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TYRANTS of TIME

by MILTON LESSER

IMAGINATION

STORIES OF SCIENCE AND FANTASY

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Introducing the



AUTHOR



Alan E. Nourse



BIOGRAPHY? What could be duller? On the medical wards we call it "the History" and start it off with the patient's "chief complaint," rapidly followed by "history of the present illness," "past medical history," "family history," "social history," and finally, physical examination. At that point any analogy, however far-fetched would fall apart, because protocol demands "impressions" and "diagnosis" to end it all, and these, in reference to me, I refuse to have printed. Let it be enough to say that fellow medics, family, and non-sf-addicted friends seem to consider anyone remotely connected with the field to be slightly balmy, and unfortunately my connection is no longer "remote"—

So I am an expatriated Iowan who through circumstances beyond my control was born in Des Moines in 1928, moved East with my family during the war under similar circumstances, went to Rutgers University for my bachelor's (biological sciences) under ditto, and now live in Philadelphia by force of circumstances. In this fine city I am studying medicine (University of Pennsylvania Medical School, 3rd year class); my wife is studying physical therapy (University of Medical Services, 4th year class)—and we quote case histories to each other over the dinner table every evening.

From the bottom of the heap I can look up and say, thank god for science fiction. To have a hob-

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IMAGINATION

*Stories
of Science
and Fantasy*

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William L. Hamling

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Frances Hamling

Managing Editor

Malcolm Smith

Art Director

April Issue On Sale

February 26th

Front cover painting by Bill Terry, illustrating a scene from TYRANTS OF TIME. Interior illustrations by Paul Calle, H. W. McCauley and Bill Terry. Cartoons by Wallace Vogel, George Ludwig, Luther Scheffy, H. Groves, and Clarence L. Shaffer, Jr.

The Editorial

SOMEDAY soon Congress is going to create a new medal for bravery. Existing ones, (including the CMH) in our mind at least will not cover the scope of daring and accomplishment for the deed. We're speaking for the man—or group of men—who make the first flight into outer space, destination Moon.

THE way we look at it that first trip into the unknown will take a special kind of guts, indeed, the ultimate stuff of which heroes are made. A soldier in battle can accomplish remarkable feats against the enemy and be justly acclaimed for his bravery. This is within the present scope of man since a soldier has something tangible to fight. Too, he has Mother Nature as an ally—darkness to protect him in attack or retreat, a fold of ground to absorb the bullet aimed at his body, and weather which can both plague and assist his efforts. He knows the odds from past experience and can calculate his chances.

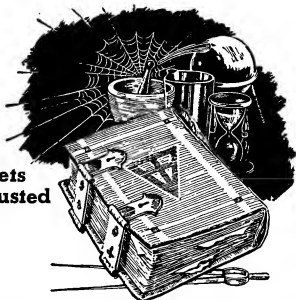
SPACE presents a different situation. It's an unknown quantity; once out there a man is on his own—completely and irrevocably. That first ship can be an engineering masterpiece on the ground, constructed with all available facts and contingencies in mind. But once it leaves Earth's atmosphere the

guess-work will become stark reality. Were all calculations correct, and if so, what unknown dangers lie ahead? There will be no Mother Nature (Earth variety) to fall back on for an assist. The crew will be detached from mankind—as if it never existed. Death will ride with them every second; meteors—unknown cosmic radiations, technical faults or miscalculations—a thousand possibilities. All to be overcome by succeeding journeys—if the first one succeeds. The odds facing that first crew will be staggering because knowledge will be pitted against the unknown. Such odds merit the highest form of recognition. We should start thinking about it today. Tomorrow some man will become Earth's greatest hero wh



"Dammit, our thermal exhaust control unit is out of whack!"

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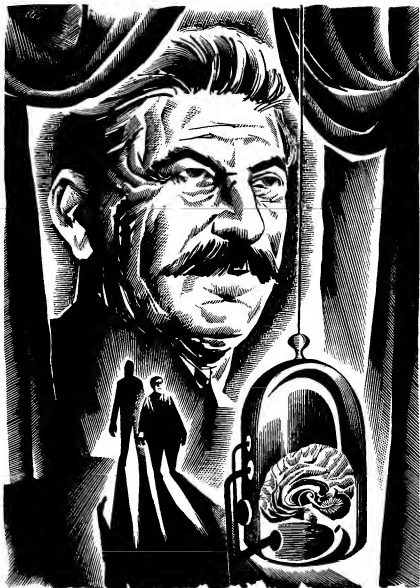
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TYRANTS OF TIME

By
Milton Lesser

Do dictators rise to power by accident? What if their ascendancy is planned throughout history by men of the future who play with time as if it were a toy. And what if 1955 is their key year . . .

SOMETHING buzzed in Tedor Barwan's right ear, driving the throbbing hum of the Eradrome momentarily away. In the sea of sound the rasp of the radio receiver buried in Tedor's mastoid bone was still unmistakable, and it alarmed him. He tongued the transmitter in his palate and said, "This is Barwan. Go ahead."

There was nothing but the noise of the Eradrome, the shouts of the hawkers of a dozen centuries, the constant droning of the tourists garbed in costumes of fifty generations, the couriers noisily arranging guided family tours, the school teachers shepherding their squealing charges primly but still unable to hide their own eagerness. Tedor repeated, "Go ahead. Go ahead!" He'd dialed for a closed connection between himself and Fornswitthe previously; thus it was

Fornswitthe who had tried to contact him.

Why?

"Tedor — help!" The voice hissed in his ear once, then was silent. It was Fornswitthe, all right. Silent now.

Tedor took long strides toward the slidefloor. The Eradrome was so crowded that he couldn't break into a run. He was bone-weary from too much work and had come to the Eradrome for a few hours of relaxation, leaving Fornswitthe alone to start their report on the 20th century. The report was dynamite.

Tedor jostled his way along on the slidefloor, not content with its slow pace. The great green-tinted bubble of the Eradrome soared five hundred feet into the air and burrowed twice that depth into the ground. Tedor was on one of the lower levels and knew it

would take some time before he could reach the surface level.

"Busman's holiday, Barwan?"

Tedor whirled sharply before boarding the next ramp. He recognized the plump, thick-jowled face but could not tag it with a name.

"Something like that," Tedor admitted and kept walking.

"Never get enough of time traveling, eh?"

"Umm."

"In your blood, I suppose. Listen, Barwan. I'm doing a solidio-film on Time Agents. Would you mind if I hung around and—"

The name came to him then. Dorlup, a film writer. "I'm in a hurry," Tedor said, thinking of Fornswitthe's desperate call.

Dorlup puffed after him. "A little exercise will do me good. Haha. Not as slim as I used to be. What would you say to five thousand and century notes for the exclusive rights to your next assignment?"

Tedor was interested in spite of himself. He was moving at top speed through the crowds and if Dorlup could keep up with him, they'd talk. "I thought the whole idea of solidiofilms was to keep clear of time travel," Tedor said.

Dorlup puffed like a blowfish out of water, lighting a big cigar. "Used to be that way. But time's

become the universal solvent. Business, pleasure, anything—all else is a dull routine. If the solidios don't turn to time, they'll go out of business in a couple of years."

"I'd like to help you, but the law requires secrecy. Besides, I'm in a hurry."

"I can keep up with you."

"Who told you I was here?"

"Coincidence."

"My foot."

"Well, Fornswitthe told me."

"What!"

"Fornswitthe, your assistant."

TEDOR paused on the slidefloor and Dorlup, his weight yielding considerable momentum, collided with him. Tedor grabbed the fat man's tunic and yanked him up on his toes. "All right, how did you find Fornswitthe?"

"I—I have my contacts. By Heaven, what's so important about that? You're hurting me, Tedor. You're causing a scene."

"I want to know."

"And I won't tell you."

"All right." Tedor let him go. "Get away from me. Go on, beat it."

A disgruntled Dorlup edged over toward the other side of the slidefloor, but Tedor called him back. "No, wait a minute. Who else knew where Fornswitthe could be found?"

"A lot of people. Secretaries. Directors. My producer. My comings and goings are no secret, Barwan. I merely told my associates I was going to visit Fornswitthe today and—"

"Today!"

"A little while ago."

"My comings and goings *are* secret," Tedor said bitterly, hurrying again along the slidefloor. "So are Fornswitthe's."

"I'll make a note of that," Dorlup promised.

"Haven't you done enough already? Someone on your staff talked. You talked. Either or both. Fornswitthe's in trouble. I hope you're satisfied, Dorlup."

"You're being melodramatic. I happen to know your territory is the 20th century; perhaps that's responsible for the way you talk. Couldn't be better for my purposes, you know. The Age of Atoms and Intrigue. Can't you see it now, in lights, glaring across a million solidio screens? *Atoms and Intrigue, The Life and Adventures of Tedor Barwan, Time Agent*. How about ten thousand? Wait, don't answer. What do you know about the year 1955?"

Tedor didn't even turn to look at him. He elbowed his way through the crowd.

"You know, man. You must

know." Dorlup huffed and puffed but managed to hold a running conversation, mostly a monologue. "The mystery year, with a capital 'M' if I ever saw one. It's in your territory. If we can crack that particular barrier and do a solidio on 1955, we'd make a fortune. I'll split it with you. We could call it '1955!' Simple. Stark. To the point . . ."

"Just what makes you think the 20th century is my territory?"

"Oh, experienced agents like you can't ever be tricked into talking, but younger men—"

Tedor clenched his fists, then calmed himself with an effort. "Because you had to visit Fornswitthe, he may be dead now."

"Really! It wasn't too hard to find his apartment, though why you Agents change your location every week is beyond me."

"Forget it," Tedor said. They had finally reached the last ramp, where pedestrian traffic was thinner. With Dorlup still shouting below him, Tedor began to sprint. He bowled over a middle-aged man but did not stop to apologize. Then he reached the surface of the green-tinted bubble and the starlight outside. He hailed a copter cab, gave the pilot Fornswitthe's current suburban address and was whisked aloft into the crowded local lanes.

HE found Fornswitthe dying on the floor of his study, a hole draining the life from his chest.

The lights were on, the windows opened, a brisk night breeze blowing the curtains into the room. Fornswitthe opened glassy eyes and tried to say something.

He was so young. So ridiculously young to be an Agent—even an Apprentice. A dying Agent, now, twenty-two years old.

Tedor propped a pillow under Fornswitthe's head, tried to staunch the flow of blood although he knew it was useless. Mechanically, he activated the transmitter buried in his palate, called Agent headquarters for help.

On the desk, a spool sat oddly askew in Fornswitthe's thinkwriter. Tedor switched it on, listened.

"In 1955. Tedor believes the year a crucial one because . . ."

A fresh spool, barely started, and as useless to Tedor as it had been to Fornswitthe's assailants. There were no other spools.

Tedor heard a rustling behind him, close at hand. He started to turn when something plummeted down heavily and exploded against the side of his head. He staggered, began to fall. He knew he was fainting, struggling against the waves of vertigo long enough to turn completely around.

A woman stood there. She held

what was left of a shattered vase in her hand, preparing to strike again. Tedor tried to reach her and managed a futile wave of his hand which told her clearly a second blow was hardly necessary.

As Tedor fell, the woman's face etched itself into his memory. It spun into giddy unconsciousness with him and his last thought was that he would never forget it.

MULID RUSCAR wore a modern robe over his quaint 18th century sleeping gown. His sandals could have been ancient Greek. The cigarette he smoked probably originated in the 20th century, clearly the smokingest of all centuries. His sleepy scowl had a way of ignoring the centuries.

"Tedor, so it's you. I thought you'd started your report."

Ruscar, a tall, dignified man who fifteen years before might have been a solidio idol, snapped on the overhead lights. "You look tired, Tedor. I know when my men need a rest."

"Fornswitthe's dead," Tedor said, then told Ruscar what had happened. "So," he finished, "I came to, called the police and rushed straight here."

"Let me see your head."

"It's all right," said Tedor, revealing the blood-matted hair. "What do you know of a solidio

writer name of Dorlup?"

"Friend of a friend. One of those things where you have to be nice. Don't tell me he had something to do with this?"

Tedor shrugged. "Coincidence maybe. I don't know. He admitted visiting Fornswitthe earlier. He's immensely interested in 1955."

"As you say, coincidence."

"That's hardly likely. Especially since Dorlup made it his business to know Fornswitthe's whereabouts. That's the part that hurts, Ruscar. If I hadn't decided to take the evening off, I'd have been helping Fornswitthe prepare the report."

"How far did he get?"

"Impossible to say. I found one spool, others probably were stolen."

Ruscar led Tedor to a chair, told him to sit down. Soon Ruscar had clamped an electrode to the side of Tedor's head, plugging the wire which led from it into the wall. "Let's concentrate on this girl you found in Fornswitthe's place."

Tedor nodded, found it ridiculously easy. Moments later, a sheet of paper popped out of a slot in the wall. Ruscar retrieved it, stared at the sketch of a beautiful face. "She looks familiar," he said, and slid the drawing into a second slot.

He offered Tedor a cigarette, and together they waited. In five

minutes, a buzzer purred, a section of a wall in front of them was bathed in light. On it appeared the twice life-size solidio of a woman.

"That's her!" Tedor cried, and read the legend under the picture. *Laniq Hadrien, age 25, height 5'6", weight 125, v. s. 36-24-36, hair blond, eyes blue. Wanted: 5th century B.C., 8th, 13th, 16th, 20th A.D. Time tinkering: pilfered fifteen valuable works of art, motive unknown.*

"I knew she looked familiar," said Ruscar after the picture had faded. "She's the daughter of a Dominique Hadrien who created quite a furor a few years back with a theory about dictatorship. Maybe you remember it."

Tedor shook his head.

"Hadrien claimed one man or group of men in our time was behind all the great dictatorships throughout human history. Sort of—well, a monopoly on despotism. He maintained the position for years, getting cantankerous when no one in our office would believe him."

"What finally happened to him?"

"Disappeared. Last seen in the middle of your stamping ground, Tedor, but before your time. The 20th century."

"1955?" Tedor suggested.

"Possibly. Although I can't see

a connection between that and Hadrien's pet theory."

"What about the theory, anyway?"

"**WE** checked into it, of course. That's our job, Tedor. We prevent time tinkering. A monopoly on despotism would be tinkering on the grand scale. For a couple of years it was a top priority job. We were never able to find out anything, so the old chief finally figured the whole thing was in Hadrien's imagination. A few years later I took over, and soon after that Hadrien disappeared.

"But you can bet we conducted a thorough investigation. You know what I think of tinkering, Tedor."

Tedor knew. Ruscar held his post as Chief of the Time Agents largely because of it.

"There is no crime worse than time tinkering. We are a people depending on time. Ours is a civilization which exists in time. Many of our workers actually commute daily to past ages. Others live and work in the past entirely, paying their taxes and visiting here occasionally. We depend on the past for virtually all of our natural resources. Think for a moment, Tedor—"

It was Ruscar's favorite subject. Tedor had heard it before, but he

found himself listening nevertheless, for Ruscar tackled this business of time tinkering with sincerity.

"Think for a moment what would happen if the past ages became aware of us. What would you do if you learned a group of men five thousand years unborn were stealing mineral wealth from under your nose, conducting tours through your backyard, exploiting you and your century for the far future?"

"I wouldn't like it."

"Exactly. So, the cardinal rule of time travel is this: don't get caught at it. When in Rome do as the Romans do. Never let it be known you come from another time. And the second rule is an adjunct of the first: conduct yourself in such a manner as to alter the flow of time only sufficiently to obtain whatever is required from the particular century. Hence the crime of time tinkering.

"There's another reason for it, of course. Suppose history was changed. Suppose, for example, someone killed your great-great-grandfather before he had the chance to sire your grandfather. What would happen?"

Tedor smiled. "You couldn't be talking to Agent G-20. I wouldn't exist."

"Precisely. You want this girl,

this Laniq Hadrien, for personal reasons. She killed Fornswithe. I want her for another reason. She is guilty of the one crime our culture cannot tolerate. She will be captured, Tedor. I'll assign a century agent to the job."

"No," said Tedor.

"Eh? What do you mean, no?"

"I want Laniq Hadrien. She's mine." If he lived forever he would never forget her face last night in Fornswithe's place, with Fornswithe dying on the floor. "I feel responsible, Ruscar. Forget the regulations this one time."

"Regulations clearly say the century agent is responsible for his own hundred years. Six to ten for a century, depending on its importance. Apprentices for each one. Like you, all the agents did intensive work in their own hundred years, learning the culture, mores, traditions. You'd be at a terrible disadvantage if we let you go galavanting all over time looking for the woman."

"I could always call on the century agents if I needed them," Tedor insisted. "They all have plenty of work as it is, and I'm due for a vacation. All right. Let me take the vacation my way. I want to look for Laniq Hadrien. If I can do the job alone, that would be a big help to the other agents."

"True."

"You have nothing to lose. Laniq was a fugitive before; she's a fugitive now. The fact that she's a murderer doesn't particularly interest you. Time tinkering is our line. But it interests me for personal reasons: I feel responsible for my Apprentice's death."

"That's reasonable."

Ruscar was weakening, Tedor could sense it. "You have nothing to lose, everything to gain. If I can find Laniq Hadrien while on vacation, no man hours were lost. You're always talking about how few man-hours we have."

Ruscar laughed softly. "You win, Tedor. I won't send out a general alarm. I won't put any century agents on Laniq Hadrien—until your vacation ends. You have one month."

"I'll find her," Tedor promised.

"Don't be so grim about it. Quite possibly Laniq represents far more than herself. If her father disappeared in the mid-20th century, perhaps he does know something about 1955. Maybe Laniq does, too. I don't want you killing her."

"She's a murderer, not me. I'll get her for you, Ruscar."

Leaving Ruscar's apartment, Tedor rummaged through his pockets for a pack of cigarettes. Agenting in the 20th century had left him with the smoking habit—which made him think of Dorlup and his big

cigars. What did Dorlup know about Laniq Hadrien?

Why was Dorlup so interested in 1955, the year time travel shunned like the plague. Not out of direct choice: after all its advance billing, 1955 would draw a horde of curiosity seekers if nothing else. But for some reason, no time traveler could penetrate the year. It was the one profound, inexplicable mystery of time-traveling, and coming at the peak of the 20th century cold war, it left a lot of questions unanswered. It presented two mysteries then. First, why couldn't time machinery operate there? Second, what had happened in that crucial year? Tedor wondered what Laniq Hadrien knew about it.

WHEN Tedor reached the far end of the pavilion, the crowds thinned to a trickle of people, most of whom were employed in the Eradrome. He entered a hallway and found a door marked with the words: *Executive Director, by appointment only.*

A pert receptionist looked up at him. "Yes, sir?"

"I'd like to see the Director."

"You have an appointment?"

"No."

"Then—"

"Here." Tedor reached into his pocket and withdrew his creden-

tials.

The receptionist's face lit up. "You're an Agent! Did you know I've been working in the Eradrome five years and you're the first agent I've ever seen? I was beginning to think they didn't really exist. I'll tell the Director you're here, Mr. Barwan."

Moments later, Tedor was ushered into a plush office which borrowed its furnishings from half a dozen civilizations. Most of the furniture was what the 20th century called Swedish modern, but the carpeting was authentic 10th century Persian, the drapes came from someplace in the Orient about five hundred years later, the pictures on the wall were replicas of drawings found in caves in southern France. The net result was garish but impressive.

Behind the birch desk sat a man of about forty, well-groomed, graying at the temples.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Barwan. Cigar?"

"Twentieth century, I see."

"It's one of the most popular eras," the Director said.

"I'd like you to check on this woman for me," Tedor said hoping the Director would excuse his abrupt departure from the customary social banter. "It's urgent." Tedor gave the Director a picture of Laniq Hadrien and added, "We

have reason to believe she's gone into time."

"Why, this is Laniq Hadrien! Certainly you know her father, Dominique Hadrien . . ."

"Yes. His theory of a monopolist of despotism has given our department some wild goose chase headaches."

The Director nodded, pressed a buzzer on his desk. A young man entered the office a moment later, receiving the picture and a few terse words before departing. "It shouldn't take long," the Director told Tedor. "Did you also know that the Hadriens, father and daughter, are non-temps?"

"No. I didn't."

"Yes, non-temps."

The non-temps, Tedor knew, were a growing cult which insisted time-travel was an evil both from the point of view of the ages visited and of the age *doing* the visiting. They had gathered considerable data to prove their point, and although Tedor never looked into it thoroughly, some said they put up a convincing though completely impractical argument.

"We've got our hands full with Hadrien and his followers, just as you have," said the Director. "You can't argue with their figures, but sometimes figures don't tell the entire story. Ten years ago, the non-temps will tell you, the popu-

lation of Earth was one billion, far smaller than it was in the past because of a sensible policy of eugenics. Today the population is somewhat short of a billion, they say, and the census verifies it.

"Ten years ago, they continue, a quarter of a million people commuted into time daily to work in the various ages, sleeping here but working and vacationing elsewhere. Today the figure has grown to three quarters of a *billion*, and it's still increasing.

"And seventy-five million people have vanished into the past. They simply preferred the past ages and broke all relations with the present. But that's the problem of you Agents, not us."

"Don't I know it!" Tedor said.

"The non-temps say this is a dangerous trend. They further maintain it is our own fault. We provide no real culture of our own, no sense of belonging. We gear everything to the past ages, converting our own world to a sort of administration center and nothing more. We work in the past, receive our raw materials in the past; our art forms more and more are concerned with other times, other places. We do nothing to encourage living in our own century."

TEDOR frowned. "In a way, it's hard to argue with that."

"Precisely. They're leaving out one important fact, however: ours is a civilization which exists not along the usual spatial lines but a civilization which exists in time. That is a whole new concept, Tedor—something unique in the history of the world. If, for example, our ancestors had found life and conditions capable of supporting life on the planets of this solar system, we doubtless would have spread out to the planets and so geared our culture in that direction. No one would have complained. But the planets are sterile, and while we could mine them for minerals, the transportation cost is prohibitive. Instead, we have turned in an entirely new—and unexpected—direction.

"If you searched every inch of the Earth today from Baffin Island to the Antarctic continent, you would find no natural deposits of coal and oil. Silver is almost gone. Gold has vanished. The list is much larger, but you get the idea. With space travel fruitless, time alone can keep mankind going. If that is an evil, then so is the act of the first caveman who crawled from his cave to discover fire.

"Naturally, one doesn't steer civilization in a completely new direction and achieve perfection overnight. Perhaps we are attacking the problem incorrectly. The non-

temps think so."

"Do you?" Tedor demanded.

The Director's eyes studied his. "That doesn't enter into it. We are interested in the non-temps because they would do away with the Eradrome and everything it stands for. This so-called monopolist of despotism is your problem. Ah, here we are."

The young man had returned with a small card in his hand. The Director read it and frowned. "I don't know how much good this information will be, Mr. Barwan. It seems Laniq Hadrien went into prehistoric times, exact destination uncertain."

"Alone?" Tedor asked.

"As far as we can tell, alone."

Tedor stood up. "Thanks a lot. At least I've got a lead."

"Good luck."

They shook hands and Tedor retraced his steps through the pavilion. He was already thinking in terms of the preparations for departure his trip would necessitate, but he couldn't get his mind off Fornswithe's murder. Somewhere, *somewhen*, an unseen puppeteer held all the strings, playing them craftily but keeping the curtain of his little stage tightly closed. Little stage? Tedor shrugged, remembering Dominique Hadrien's wild contention. Perhaps all of time waited beyond its dark foot-

lights.

FAT Dorlup the solidio writer drank in local color like a starving cat laps up milk.

The time was 1954, the date Easter Sunday, the place, Fifth Avenue in New York, largest city in one of the two most powerful national states of the day.

Crowds jostled Dorlup. No one seemed to have anyplace to go, Dorlup least of all. The twentieth century suit he wore was tight and ill-fitting; he was almost afraid a too-sudden move might burst his posterior from its tight confines. That's what you get for rushing, Dorlup thought irritably. But the Century Agent had frightened him. Damn those Agents with their high-handed ways. Dorlup was used to dealing with people, not martinets. He had extended the hand of friendship, even of financial gain, to Barwan, but it had been rejected coldly, unequivocally.

The Twentieth Century Corporation was another possibility, although Barwan would certainly offer a solidio audience more glamour. Well, when the city returned to normal tomorrow, Dorlup would offer the Corporation his proposition, though he realized sadly they would never be satisfied with the five thousand century notes he had

offered the Agent.

"Hey, Dorlup! Oh you, Dorlup!"

The fat solidio writer whirled at the sound of the woman's voice, then groaned. Beti Sparr, a starlet who had been featured tragically (not in the story but in the gross profit which was nil, Dorlup thought bitterly) pushed her way through the crowd toward him. Beti wore a costume of the day and wore it well. She had blond hair and looks and a figure. If only she could act, thought Dorlup.

"Whatever are you doing here, Dorlup? My but you look silly in that suit." Beti entwined her arm in his.

"I'm doing research for a new solidio."

"Oh, but that's wonderful. I'm on vacation, you know, but I could learn the part while I'm here and —"

"My dear," said Dorlup icily, "I haven't considered casting yet. The solidio is just an idea in my head, and it will be a long time before I—"

"I can wait. Did you notice how positively garish the costumes are, how completely absorbed in their own importance the people seem?"

Beti had spoken in perfect hypnosleep-induced English, and Dorlup said: "Quiet! Do you want

them to hear you?"

"Oh, but they won't *understand*. They won't understand anything. So—so archaic. I'm hungry, Dorlup."

"I'm not." He tried to move away, but the crowd pressed in all around them and Beti still had her arm entwined in his.

"I've always wanted to try one of those automatic cafeterias. Shall we?"

Dorlup wanted passionately to say no, but Beti was already steering him toward the facade of one of the buildings.

"Sparr is rather remarkable," someone in the crowd said to someone else. "Whatever Dorlup is up to, she'll find out. But whoever would have suspected Dorlup is connected with the Century Agents, eh?"

"You can say that again. Leave it to Sparr, though."

Beti Sparr steered Dorlup into the automatic cafeteria, chattering and whispering in his ear.

Elsewhere in the state of New York, one of the forty-eight United States in the year 1954, a policeman on motorcycle chased a motorist, flagged him down and gave him a summons although in truth he had not violated the speed limit. This was his third such summons in a period of eighteen months, and under state law his

driver's license would be revoked. He complained long and loud but to no avail. Actually, his life had been saved, for three months hence he was to be involved in a fatal automobile accident. The summons which revoked his license also revoked the need for his obituary. He never knew this, but the policeman did. The policeman—not a policeman at all in the accepted twentieth century meaning of the word—was guilty of an act of time-tinkering. The man was an artist, though, a promising sculptor, and would in the next few years—if he lived—make a valuable contribution to twentieth century culture.

Thousands of miles away in a many-centuries-old tumble of gaunt, grim buildings called the Kremlin in a city named Moscow, capitol of Russia, the other great power in the twentieth century, a massive man with sallow, pallid face and a ponderous gait paced back and forth waiting for the state scientists to summon him. This was the half Tartar, Georgi Malenkov, crushed by the weight of empire on his incapable shoulders. And when the scientists called, Malenkov plodded fearfully into a huge, windowless room where great, unfamiliar machinery throbbed strangely. What he encountered there was also a case of time-tinkering—but of an entirely different nature.

Malenkov stared in frightened fascination at the contents of a bell-jar suspended from the ceiling and bathed in white, vaguely violet radiation.

A voice, metallic, far away, wavering, said: "Ahh, Georgi."

And Malenkov, heir to the mantle of Stalin and ruler of all the Russian people and their hundreds of millions of satellite subjects fell on his knees and cried, "It speaks! It speaks!"

Many hundreds of miles distant, in an unimportant place called Afghanistan, Dominique Hadrien waited impatiently and with growing alarm for word from his daughter. He had chosen Afghanistan precisely for its unimportance. Although he knew Laniq was a capable girl, their adversaries were shrewd, merciless men possessed of a megalomania which would readily lead to acts of violence. Dominique Hadrien decided to wait one day longer and then send his most experienced time traveler after Laniq.

THE trail led to Ur of the Chaldees, to ancient Sumeria, to Babylonia, the cradle of civilization. Always Tedor arrived too late, always the angry little pip darting about on his chronoscreen indicated Laniq Hadrien was one step ahead of him.

But it was not until he left Sec-

ond Dynasty Egypt that he noticed another pip on the screen. He was following Laniq, but so was someone else. Another saucer-shaped craft plied the time streams in their wake, making all the stops they made, starting up again when they did. Experimentally, Tedor thrust his own conveyor forward in time until he'd passed the girl and left her decades behind him. The second conveyor became a frenzied pip on the screen, plummeting through the years with him.

The second conveyor did not follow Laniq Hadrien. It followed Tedor. He considered it and got nowhere. It failed to make sense. In the first place, privately owned time-craft were rare, belonging only to the few rich people who could afford them, to members of Laniq Hadrien's organization or to Time Agents. The century coaches carried most traffic through time, and no century coach would go off the well-traveled trails to follow Tedor.

One of the Hadrien woman's people? Perhaps, but he wouldn't have immediately accelerated through time to chase Tedor, not if he were trailing the woman for protection. A rich man on a pleasure jaunt? Hardly likely. Certainly not another Time Agent! Tedor scowled and turned his attention back to the girl. Laniq

was landing.

Quickly, Tedor checked the time-charts, plugged in a hypnosleep spool, fastened the electrodes to his temples, drugged himself, and within an hour learned thoroughly the Attic Greek spoken by the denizens of the Fifth Century who had rubbed shoulders in the Agora with Socrates, Alcibiades and Pericles, five hundred years before Christ was born and some generations before Attica and its Athens were to feel the grim tread of the Macedonian phalanxes then of the Roman legions. Tedor ran the micro-film projector, found the pictures he sought, fed them into the slot of the matter duplicator and soon donned the mantle and tunic, the sandals and head band of an Athenian gentleman.

He stepped outside into a grove of plane trees, found Laniq Hadrien's craft a hundred yards away but saw nothing of the third conveyor. Shrugging, he set out upon the road to Athens, wondering how many minutes he was behind the girl. Other citizens walked the road with Tedor, some chatting aimlessly with him, others strolling by in polite silence because he had selected the garment of a high-ranking citizen and they were beneath his station.

The slave at the gate, an immense bronze man, skin and hair

slick with olive oil, looked up from where he'd been resting his chin on the haft of his spear when Tedor asked, "Did you see an unescorted woman come through this gate?"

"Yes sir." The voice was deep, metallic of timbre. "A lone woman is unusual on these avenues, as you of course know." Women were second class citizens in Athens, remaining in their homes except on rare intervals and never venturing out alone unless they were so old and so ugly no men would care to look at them. "Further," the slave went on, "this girl carried a strange black box which she pointed at me. I heard a clicking sound and wondered what kind of magic might dwell within it."

"You have nothing to fear," Tedor assured him. So Laniq Hadrien was taking pictures. "Which way did the woman go?"

"She asked the direction of the Agora. Again, most peculiar, as who does not know the location of the marketplace in Athens?"

TEDOR thanked him and set off at a fast pace down one of the mean streets radiating from the gate. He reached the Agora merely by following the crowds, and wended his way through the crowded marketplace with the shouts of the fish, bread, wine and honey-

mongers on all sides of him.

The tradesmen jockeyed their pushcarts around for more advantageous positions; the slaves ran nimbly about the Agora on nameless errands; the gentlemen of leisure, garbed in embroidered tunics and mantles of white, red, purple and black, sauntered without hurry under the shade of the adjacent *stoas*, servants following behind them or preceding them like schools of pilot fish.

It was a hot day, the bright sun scorching everything and engendering an odor in the fish-carts which made the fish-mongers decidedly unpopular. Twice Tedor spotted Laniq ahead of him in tunic and mantle but with her hair free, snapping pictures with her camera, but each time the crowds swirled in ahead of him and he lost her.

The third time he shouted her name and she ran. He took off after her and tripped over something, stumbling against a fish-cart and overturning it. The vendor was an ugly old man with warts all over his face and a raspy voice. He threw a steady torrent of invective at Tedor, and in all these generations the meanings hadn't changed even if the sounds had. Tedor kept running, for he lacked Athenian money to pay the fish vendor. But by then he had lost Laniq Hadrien once more.

Her trail led him through all the stalls of the Agora but he did not see her again. He began to realize it would be foolish to remain in Athens any longer for fear he might lose her entirely when he became aware someone was following him. The man maintained two dozen paces distance between them. The man hurried when he hurried, slowed when he did. Tedor stopped, then turned swiftly and sprinted toward the mantled figure.

"All right," he said, gathering up a fistful of the mantle and holding the man. "Why were you following me?"

"I don't know what you're talking about. It's a free city."

"For citizens, it is," said Tedor harshly. "Whose son are you?" To say whose son you were was the equivalent of telling a man your name, since surnames were as yet unknown in Athens. Tedor suspected his follower, like Laniq and himself, did not belong in Athens.

He admired the man's poise. A vague suggestion of uneasiness crept over his eyes like a film, then he smiled and said, "I am Posicles, son of Posicles."

The slight pause was enough, however. "Get this straight," Tedor told him. "You'll deny any understanding of what I'm saying,

but listen to me; I'm leaving Athens, I'm leaving Greece, I'm leaving this century. I don't want you following me. Is that clear?"

"Clearly, the Mysteries have befuddled your mind, my friend."

"If I see you again anyplace else I'm going to kill you. You live now only because I'm not altogether certain. Is *that* clear?"

"It is clear you are possessed."

"Yes, the man had poise. Abruptly, Tedor struck him back-handed across the face and listened to him curse. It was an old trick, but like most old tricks, it worked. The man cursed fluently in Tedor's own language.

"Well, well, well," Tedor said. The man bolted and ran.

Tedor retraced his steps toward the gate, hoping he'd return to the grove of plane trees ahead of Laniq Hadrien.

BY the light of a crescent moon, Laniq found her conveyor, entered it, switched on a night light she knew would be swallowed by the darkness outside.

Stripping the mantle from her body, she walked to a cabinet and found her own clothing—shorts and blouse and sandals. Dropping her Grecian tunic to the floor she stood naked for a moment then climbed into her shorts.

Someone cleared his throat.

Laniq jumped as if she had been struck, plunged the room into darkness and remained absolutely silent. The room—the main cabin of the conveyor—measured twelve by twelve feet: There were cabinets, files, boxes, furniture. Ample place to hide. And someone—a man—was hiding there. A Grecian would have been frightened by the conveyor in all probability. Then had she been followed?

"Put on a light," a voice said.

Laniq gritted her teeth. She had no weapon, but even if she did, a wild shot might damage the conveyor's controls. "I'm not dressed," she told the darkness meaninglessly.

"Put the light on and get into the center of the room where I can see you. I'm carrying an atomic pistol and I won't hesitate to use it. I have another conveyor, you don't. If yours is damaged I won't care. I'm going to count to three."

Laniq found her blouse and began fumbling with the zipper.

"One."

Laniq got the blouse over her shoulder.

"Two."

Struggling to close the zipper now, Laniq groped for the light, found it, switched it on. She clambered into the center of the room, stumbling over something and falling flat. She sat up, groggy, un-

able to fasten the zipper and feeling every inch a helpless woman fighting against a cunning, ruthless foe in the time stream.

"That's better."

Laniq looked around, saw no one. She finally managed to fasten the zipper. She sat there, staring. "Well, where are you?"

Silence.

She was on the point of getting up and looking around despite the warning, when the conveyor door opened. She stared, mouth agape. A man entered the conveyor, nodded curtly at her and said, "Stay put." He waved an atomic pistol for emphasis, and since he had just come from outside and no anachronistic weapons were permitted outside conveyors, he was either a Century Agent or one of the monopolist's men.

Either way, Laniq was raging. He had fooled her with an obvious trick. Not wanting to be taken by surprise himself, he had merely planted an amplifier in her conveyor, waited till she entered, then addressed her from the safety of his own craft. He hadn't entered her conveyor until he was reasonably certain she would listen to him.

"Where are we going?" Laniq demanded as he set the controls, his back to her.

"Home to our own time," he

said, and turned to face her.

WITH despair, she recognized the man she had struck in the dead Agent's apartment.

"Wait. Please." Laniq pleaded.

"What for? I've come over twenty-thousand years looking for you. I swore to find you ever since the night you killed my apprentice."

"Then you *are* an Agent."

"What did you think I was, Miss Hadrien?"

"Well, we were advised Fornswithe and a man named Barwan had returned from the twentieth century with a report that would help our cause. Since there was a chance it would uncover this monopolist my father has been talking about—uh, you know my father?"

"I know all about him."

"Anyway, we were watching Fornswithe's place. It was left unguarded for not more than an hour, but that was enough. I returned in time to see you standing over Fornswithe's body and . . . say! If you're not one of them, if you *are* an Agent, you must be Barwan."

Tedor nodded, continued adjusting the controls.

"Wait, Barwan. If you came twenty thousand years, then give me ten minutes."

"You didn't give Fornswithe any

kind of a chance," Tedor said bitterly.

"I thought *you* killed him!" she insisted. "But tell me, what did you find in the twentieth century?"

"That's none of your business."

"It is my business. If the Agents are going to sit by and let the biggest case of time-tinkering go on right in front of their noses, it's got to be someone's business. I take it you know my father's theory. All the most powerful dictators through history have not worked alone. Someone in our own time—we don't know who—has been helping them. If he could control the most powerful rulers in history, he could control the entire time-stream from the dawn of civilization to our own age. Labor, raw material, armies—all the world would be under his control. You found something in the twentieth century which substantiates that."

"Maybe," said Tedor.

"Maybe nothing. You found the Russians were getting outside aid—from our century."

"Even if I did—all right, I did—1955 is still the crucial year. I'm no different from anyone else. I can't enter 1955."

"Not in a time-conveyor, you can't. But you could set yourself down in the latter part of '54 and simply wait for '55 to roll

around."

Tedor gasped audibly. "I never thought of that! No one did."

"My father did. He's there now. Listen to me, Barwan! There's so much going on that you Century Agents either know nothing about or do nothing about."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Clearly, this monopolist is a big-shot in our own day, with plenty of power."

"Dorlup?"

"I never heard of him."

"Solidio writer, but never mind. And this talk won't get you anywhere. You're going back with me."

"I didn't think it would. But I want to show you a few things." Laniq stood up, crossed the floor to him even though he waved the atomic pistol in warning. "Oh, put that thing away. If the fact that you're armed and I'm not stands between free world and slave world, you might as well go ahead and shoot me if it will make you happy."

L ANIQ came so close Tedor could have reached out and touched her. The zipper on her blouse had been closed hastily halfway, revealing white throat and curving breasts.

"Give me the pistol," Laniq said.

Tedor looked at her, snorted in

disbelief. But he put the weapon in his pocket and told her, "Go ahead and talk."

Laniq grasped his shoulder impulsively. "Barwan, you've got to listen! We can make a quick tour through time, just hitting the high spots. I can show you things; I can show you a man from our own time behind every important dictator in history. We've beaten them all along the line, so you don't have to worry about it. Except for the twentieth century. It's a crucial age, Barwan, and we're not winning. The whole course of future history might be changed if we don't.

"That's crazy. Future history already *is*."

"I'm surprised at you. Why do you Agents make all that fuss about time-tinkering? There's no telling what might happen if history is changed—it's never gotten out of hand yet. But change its flow in the mid-twentieth century and we could be in for a mess of trouble. Maybe there's an alternate time-stream, perhaps we'll be thrust into it. I don't know—and neither do you."

What she said was perfectly true. Mulid Ruscar had always been very strong on that point. *Don't wait to find out*, he always said.

"Okay," Tedor told her. "All

right, you win. We'll take this tour of yours. But remember this: I still think you know more about Fornswitthe's death than you're telling me. If you try to get away, I'll kill you. On the other hand, if you prove your point I have a month at my disposal. I can help you."

Laniq grinned happily. "I could kiss you, Barwan. Here, let me at those controls."

Tedor stepped aside and waited with mounting impatience while she set the time-conveyor for their first stop. Would Ruscar approve? He doubted it. Still, he was on vacation and he sensed a ring of sincerity in what Laniq had told him. He wondered how much her breathless beauty had to do with his decision, then found himself snorting again. He'd never lacked women, not as a Century Agent. But they'd always come to him, whining his name, begging almost. Laniq he would have to go and fetch.

And then Tedor felt the familiar sensation as the conveyor purred off into the time-stream.

"TURN of the century," said Laniq when they had stopped. "Eighth and ninth centuries A. D. Did you ever hear of Charlemagne?"

"Of course," Tedor nodded. "Ruler of the Franks, later of Ger-

many, Italy; first emperor of the Holy Roman Empire."

"He needed help," Laniq said. "Come."

Tedor followed her outside into a murky summer night. The torch-lights of an ancient city pulsed and throbbed off to their left.

"His capital, Aix-la-Chapelle," said Laniq. "Charlemagne got help from the monopolist, Barwan. Fortunately, when Charles the Great died his Paladins couldn't hold the Empire together. Despite Papal acceptance, the Holy Roman Empire was a paper kingdom after Charlemagne."

Outside Tours proper, Charlemagne had set up a tent city in which the elite of his Army bivouacked. Clusters of tents dotted the plain, cook-fires cast eerie light, sentries prowled and plodded sleepily. Tedor heard loud talking in the old dialect of the Franks. Hypnosleep had yielded a new language to him again in a matter of minutes.

They crept up behind a sentry, were on the point of passing him when Laniq stumbled. The sentry whirled, spear poised, but Tedor ducked under it in the darkness and used the edge of his hand against the sentry's Adam's apple. It was dirty fighting, but necessary. The sentry went down silently and Tedor grabbed the spear before it

could clatter.

"Stay here," he told Laniq. He had materialized for himself the clothing of a Frank warrior. With it and his spear he strode boldly to Charlemagne's own tent, relieving the sentry who paced outside it, then a few moments later relieving the guard inside.

"I don't know you," the man grumbled.

"I'm new," said Tedor. "German. Go to sleep."

Charlemagne was a tall, slender man fully six and a half feet in height, with white hair and a long white beard. He paced back and forth anxiously, great hands folded behind his richly robed back.

"The road to Rome is not open," he said to someone irritably, as if he had said it before but the man refused to take no for an answer.

"Not yet, it isn't," his guest answered suavely. He was a younger man, clean-shaven like Tedor. "I can open it for you. Empire awaits you, Charles; don't turn away from it."

"I still do not even know who you are."

"Nor will you—ever."

"What do you want if you help me attain this Empire?"

"Assistance. Troops if we demand them. Labor conscripted in your border countries. Certain minerals."

"Not gold?"

"Not gold."

Tedor stood his watch not a dozen feet from them at the entrance to the tent. The stranger might be from the future, although Tedor had seen nothing to prove it. He activated the transmitter embedded in his palate with his tongue, whispered almost inaudibly, "You are not alone."

Charlemagne had not heard him. The stranger could not have heard, either, unless he had a receiver in his ear. The stranger jumped as if stung. "Where are you?" Tedor heard in his ear, then watched as the stranger made a great show of clearing his throat.

"You are sure?" Charlemagne was saying. "No gold?"

Tedor never heard the answer. He fled back the way he had come, found Laniq crouching near one of the cook-fires.

"You might have escaped," he said.

"Did you see?"

"I saw. I knew you wouldn't try anything. I'm ready for another visit, Laniq."

Then was there indeed a monopolist? Ruscar had scoffed at the idea. Dominique Hadrien had gone into hiding. The twentieth century, Laniq had said. But if Hadrien knew what he was talking about, Tedor must find more evi-

dence and return with it to Ruscar. Once Ruscar had said something about tinkering on the grand scale. This made all other tinkering seem meaningless by comparison, and Tedor shuddered when he thought of the consequences it might have for the future. Laniq claimed they had beaten it in every age but Tedor's own stamping grounds, the twentieth century, but he knew that century alone could be more than sufficient, for it was one of the great turning points in history. Was that why Dorlup was interested?

"Come on," said Laniq.

"THE dialect you learned," she told him later, "is Yakka Mongol. This is the thirteenth century, Barwan. We are in the Gobi desert. You know of Genghis Kahn?"

"Of course. A mongol leader who conquered all of Asia—his own Gobi, India, China. He moved on into Europe, too, sweeping the Russian, Polish and Hungarian Armies to defeat. He probably conquered more of the world than any other single man."

They stood on a high, wind-swept plateau with vast reaches of glistening white sand all around them. Legions of wind-driven dunes marched endlessly to the horizon, but a mile or so to the

east reed-bordered ponds ruled over a verdantly green oasis. Surrounding the oasis was Genghis Kahn's city of yurts—the dwellings borrowing some of the features of the tent and some of the American aborigine tepees.

Dung-fires tainted the air with an unpleasant pungency. Strangely, Tedor discovered, there were no guards, no sentries.

"Their sentries have outposts on the desert," Laniq explained. "If a large body of horsemen arrives, they will see it in plenty of time. As for the lone traveler, he could be nothing but a friend. An enemy would not live long in this place."

They advanced on the oasis, the unfamiliar yakskin clothing itching Tedor's skin, the stain which converted him to a Mongol in appearance smarting in his eyes. Before long the black felt yurts were not ahead of them but all around them and they walked, completely uncontested, to the very door of Genghis Kahn's own yurt, the standard of the nine yak tails billowing above it in the stiff wind.

The Kha Khan, the Emperor of Mankind, the Power of God on Earth, the Master of Thrones and Crowns, the Mighty Manslayer—Genghis Kahn squatted, Oriental fashion, by his dung fire. With him were two men, the first old and bent, a scraggly white beard falling

to his ornate belt. The second was younger and—Tedor may have imagined it—he seemed to be squirming and scratching in the yakskin clothing.

"He can work magic," the ancient man declared. "I have seen him blast rocks, Oh Kahn. I have seen him make fire from a simple tube. Heed wisely his words, Oh Kahn."

Genghis Kahn wore long, plaited, greased red hair. His coarse, wind-beaten features worked themselves into a scowl. "He speaks fantasies," said the Kahn.

"Not fantasy," the third man at the fire said, sniffing distastefully, Tedor thought, at the dung-fumes. "Truth. I say this: Genghis Kahn can one day master all the world, from the Land of Morning Calm to the city called Vienna."

"Of Vienna I have never heard."

"One day you will," the younger man promised, "but sure, bold strokes are essential. The Shah of Persia would stop you. You balk at crossing his frontiers. You would return to Karakorum and rest."

"Yes. My capital is a beautiful city, and I *would* rest."

"You must never rest, not with all mankind ready to fall at your feet! The Shah of Persia anticipates border actions, clashes, sorties, patrols. Fool him. Strike with your entire army at the gate-



way city. It is far to the south of here, in a warmer land, but it is the gateway to the West for your people, Oh Kahn."

"Who is he?" Tedor whispered.

"Working for the monopolist, from our own time. Here in this age they call him Chepe Noyon and he is one of the Kahn's two greatest generals. Shh."

"I will lead your army, Oh Kahn. I, Chepe will lead it, and if I fall you may have me flayed."

"He can work magic," said the shaman.

"He had better," the Kahn declared dryly. "For we march from here to Karakorum to resupply our Army and from Karakorum we will take the southern route across the mountains to Tibet to the West. We will hit Bokhara in the spring."

The Kahn is wise," said Chepe Noyon, still scratching at his yak-skin garments.

"Let's get out of here," Tedor whispered.

But the shaman looked up, said; "And who are those two, that man and woman?"

Genghis Kahn shrugged imperial shoulders. Chepe shook his head.

"Then I say they are an evil omen."

"Ho!" roared Genghis Kahn, evidently more superstitious than history had suspected. "Detain them!"

YAKKA warriors converged on them. Tedor grabbed Laniq's hand and started running, fanning his atomic pistol's fire all around them. He caught a glimpse of Chepe Noyon's face, astonishment stamping the features, and then he forgot everything but the fact that they had to run—and hard—over the shifting, seething sand.

The desert was strewn with corpses, but the warriors kept coming, for life was cheap on the Gobi. Presently they showed sufficient imagination to keep well back out of range of the atomic pistol, however, and when Tedor and Laniq reached the time-conveyor they were alone.

They tumbled inside, Laniq running to the controls and Tedor bolting the door. Tedor would never forget Chepe Noyon's face as they departed. He did not have to say *you are not alone*. Clearly Chepe knew it.

"Enough!" Tedor cried. "I believe you." His head was whirling, but if the girl said her people had beaten the monopolist in all but the twentieth century, he wanted to go there at once.

She smiled at him. "No. I want to really convince you."

They watched Tamerlane's abortive attempt to repeat Genghis Kahn's Asiatic Conquest. They stood by while a man from the far

future gave England's Cromwell the necessary encouragement for his *coup d'état*. ("Cromwell's head will roll anyway," Laniq said cheerfully.) The pages of history came alive again when Napoleon cavorted for them at Elba, convinced by a man who appeared mysteriously out of nowhere to break the chains of his exile and try his hand once more at world empire. ("Thank God for Wellington.") They watched Kerensky's provisional government fall in the days of the Russian Revolution, paving the way for Communist dictatorship. But Kerensky was betrayed from within, and not by a Russian but a man from the future. ("We don't know about this one yet, Barwan.") And not the Germans in a secret railroad train, but men from the future in a time-conveyor, spirited Lenin back from Russia in time to assume the mantle of empire and so pave the way for Stalin and Malenkov.

"I want to show you one thing more before we head for the year 1954," Laniq told Tedor, whose head by now was swimming with a vast new—and sinister—concept of history. "Did you ever hear of Adolph Hitler?"

THE city was Munich in the early 1920's, narrow cobbled

streets all a-clatter with horses and wagons and learning the new sound of the gasoline automobile and the swaying electric trolley. Munich, Germany, city of commerce, transportation hub noisy with the sounds of arrival and departure, its byways crowded with small homburgs, bicycles, checkered caps. The Munich of the Beer Halls and great steins of hearty German beer and singing and raucous laughter. But also the Munich of unrest, distrust, intense intellectual turmoil, and the Munich which, not many months later, was to be the scene of the abortive *putsch* in a beer cellar which started a slight little man with stray-locked dark hair on his path toward world conquest.

They sat in a beer hall, Laniq and Tedor, and at a table near them sat a man, young but with eyes which to Tedor were at once the most fiery, most intense and oldest he had even seen. He was a man, Tedor guessed, who would never know a tranquil moment in his life; cold, friendless, fidgety, smouldering with nameless resentments.

"That's Hitler," Laniq said unnecessarily. "It is why we have come here."

They had spent three hours in the beer cellar so often frequented by Hitler, a second-rate poster

artist, ex-Army corporal and smouldering revolutionary.

A man came to the table and joined Hitler, not half a dozen feet from where Laniq and Tedor sat with their beer. As the one was stamped with his personality as clearly as ever a man could be, so the other was poker-faced nondescript, neither German nor non-German, feverish agitator nor tranquil pacifist.

"You have come," said Hitler, easily loud enough for Tedor to hear. "It is good. I have spent the entire day thinking of what you have told me. It is like a storm bursting inside of me, a happy torment, as if it holds the seeds of a strife which can make everything clear, lucidly clear for Germany and the world, their destiny, one the master the other the follower. You will one day be a great man."

"Not I, Adolph. You harbor the inherent qualities for greatness."

"I know," said Hitler, and made it sound the most natural thing in the world. "I was born for greatness, I will be great. But you have earned it with your perception, your understanding, with your ability to point out objectively what I could not see for my raging emotions."

"It is only common sense, Adolph. You had the idea; clear-

ly, the idea was in you. A year, two years, it would have materialized. I merely acted like a catalyst."

"To the East," said Hitler in a dreamy voice, all the while his eyes burned furiously, "is the Bolshevik, the Red Scourge, the hated, feared enemy of mankind. To the West is the Democratic world, the England of many centuries, the France of polite ways and laughable indecisions, the young America, still trying its wings.

"Which is the enemy of the people? I will tell you which. It is as you have said. The Red, the Communist Bolshevik is the enemy of the people. Tell them, 'See, the Red is coming!' and they will run, to arms, defending their homes and what they love as if it were Ragnarok itself. Good. We will tell them that.

"And which is the enemy of Hitler, the real enemy of Hitler who—as you say—was born to lead Germany, the Third Reich, to world glory? It is not the Red Bolshevik, no. It is the West, with its standard of living, its broad, idealistic aims which while incapable of bearing fruit are nevertheless infinitely attractive; the West with its showcase democracy, the West with its guaranteed personal liberties for morons and sub-morons, the West which yearns after the in-

dividual to the neglect of the state and so makes all individuals everywhere yearn so too.

"I will fire my people with hatred for the Red when hatred for the Jew has weakened because one day we will exterminate the Jew. The one is a legitimate hatred, the other a fancied one—but with the fires once stoked, the hatred will burn brightly. When it turns, as assuredly it will, to still a third and now unthinkable hatred, frenzy will ride high the crest of a wave—and the legions of the Third Reich will turn suddenly and devastatingly on the West, which today the German people cannot hate but which will one day bear the brunt of their hatred and power and rage because I, Hitler, tell them so."

"I am glad I could bring this to the surface in you so much sooner than it otherwise might have appeared," said the non-descript man.

"You are glad? *You?*" Tears streamed down Hitler's face, yet he laughed. "Think how I feel. I, Hitler. A man today, a God tomorrow, because you showed me the way. Name your price, request your reward; when the world is mine the half you want shall be yours."

"I want only what is best for Germany and its people," said the man.

"What he means," Laniq whis-

pered to Tedor, "is he wants what is best for the monopolist. Naturally he's one of our own people. Fortunately for the world, he drove this point home too strongly. Hitler will move, and soon, making a wild, incredible bid for power. When it aborts, he will bide his time for another decade, giving the free world additional time to prepare."

"Why don't we wait for him outside, take him, and see what we can learn?" Tedor demanded.

"Risk everything on that when we know Hitler will fail? This man probably doesn't know the monopolist, anyway. He is a shadow figure, a ghost. None of them knows his identity, at least that has been my experience."

"Still—"

"Still nothing. The twentieth century's middle years are the significant ones. Let all else ride if we must, for it is there the monopolist will either succeed or fail with plans that will make the dreams of a dozen Hitlers seem something less than child's play."

"Okay, Laniq. You win. But remember this; once we get to my stamping grounds, I'm going to take over. Brief me if you want to, but I have the contacts. Besides, I came hell-bent into the time-stream looking for you and now I find apparently all my ideas need readjusting. I'll be able to

think a lot better with some affirmative action under my belt."

"Very well. What do we do first?"

"Well, now—"

"We seek out my father in Afghanistan, naturally. He can do the briefing you suggest. After that . . ."

"After that I take over," Tedor growled, then smiled. "Come on."

"MY father's followers needed an out-of-the-way place like this," Laniq explained as the time-conveyor dropped out of the time-stream and cruised along above the desert. "We're building a spaceship, you see."

"A spaceship? What for? There is nothing worth while on the planets, nothing worth the trouble to mine it."

"My fault, Tedor. I should have said a starship. If necessary, we'll go to the stars. Oh, we can do it, although the trip will take generations and only a few hundred people will find room. We won't do it unless the monopolist forces us. If he gains the dictatorial control of time he's seeking, we'll have no choice. We're collecting trophies, artifacts of man's culture, just in case. We'll gladly put them in a museum or return them if the monopolist fails." Laniq turned to the port, gazed down on the des-

ert sweeping by. Suddenly; "Tedor!"

Tedor stood beside her and stared down. There had been a village of tents below them. There now were the remains of tents in a well-watered oasis—but no village.

Fires smouldered below them. Charred wreckage lay strewn about the rolling dunes and jumbled rock on either side of the oasis. A great silver hull—the body of an incomplete starship, Tedor knew, lay on its side, a dying animal, huge rents and gashes disfiguring it like ugly, bloodless scars.

"Tedor—Tedor—I'm afraid!"

Tedor took the conveyor down, landing it adjacent to the wrecked starship. He climbed out first, helped Laniq alight. Dazed, clasping and unclasping her hands, she walked about the oasis. In some of the burned tents dishes were set on crude tables. Personal equipment was everywhere, on the floors, on the charred plastoid beds, in hastily emptied lockers. Most of the fires had burned themselves out, but smoke still curled lazily into the dry, hot air of the desert.

"They came, Tedor. They destroyed—everything."

Tedor stood mutely, uncomfortably, not knowing what to say. Everything he thought about Laniq had changed so drastically in the

space of a few hours and now he wanted to help her, but could do nothing.

"Miss Hadrien. Miss Hadrein!"

They whirled together, saw a dark head poke itself out from behind one end of the spaceship, large burnoose very white over the brown skin. It was a boy of perhaps fourteen. He was trembling, his lips puckered. He sobbed. "Oh, Miss Hadrien . . ."

Laniq went to him, patted his shoulder. "Mahmud, there now. It must have been awful, I know. There, Mahmud."

With someone to comfort him, Mahmud cried all the more. He wailed loudly, letting the tears gush down his cheeks, abandoning his body to wracking sobs.

Tedor who spoke Persian and understood it, realized the boy would go right on crying and Laniq comforting him and so not finding time to cry herself. And so he said, "Mahmud, tell me what happened. Tell me where Miss Hadrien's people are."

Mahmud sniffled, blinked his eyes, plucked a handful of gummy dates from the folds of his burnoose. He munched, sniffled again. "Dead," he sobbed. "They are all dead, almost."

Laniq sobbed too, clutching little Mahmud's shoulder more firmly. "Dead?" she cried. "Dead?

Where?"

"Maybe not all, Miss Hadrien. Those that could, fled—taking the dead with them. It happened not long ago when three round craft came down from the sky and burned everything. They struck without warning. My people fled."

"You are very brave, Mahmud," Laniq declared. "What—happened to my father?"

"The Hadrien Sir was badly hurt, Miss. Of that much I am sure. They carried him with much moaning and bleeding into their craft, your people did, and went to the West. 'Laniq' he kept mumbling. He looked at me while they carried him and said 'Laniq! you tell Laniq we went to Nevada. She'll know where. Tell Laniq we went to Nevada, but tell no one else.' That is what he said and I Mahmud, remember every word."

"Thank you, Mahmud. And what about you?"

Mahmud smiled for the first time. "Oh, presently I will return among my people who fled in the face of all this terror from the sky. But it will not be the same."

"It will be the same," said Laniq. "They are your people."

"I say it will not be the same, but thank you, Miss. I will go among my people with my great sadness and remember yours for-

ever."

"If I thought you would be happy, I would take you with me."

"Miss—"Mahmud looked at her hopefully.

"No, Mahmud. You won't understand this, not yet. But they are your people, your home and your world. You could not pick up the threads of a new life and a new way of life without sorrow. Your people did what anyone else would have done, including *my* people. They had their own homes to protect; they could not throw their lives away vainly in my people's defense."

Mahmud smiled again, then turned to go. "I was hoping you would say that, Miss Hadrien." He trotted off with head high and shoulders squared.

"He'll be all right, I think," Laniq said. "We'd better get to Nevada, Tedor."

Together they ran for the time-conveyor. It hurt her not to, but Laniq never looked back at the devastated community.

"SEVENTEEN, red," fat Dorlup proclaimed to the croupier in a Reno gambling joint.

The wheel spun, the ball clicked, rattled, jumped with it.

"Seventeen, red," declared the croupier in an awed voice as he raked a tall stack of chips toward

the one Dorlup had placed in the red seventeen. Dorlup gathered the stack in with his pudgy arms and deposited it carelessly in the growing mountain of chips nearby.

"You're wonderful," the honey-blond solidio actress told him, squeezing his arm to add emphasis.

There was no shaking Beti, not since that day, months ago, when she had steered Dorlup into the Automat in New York. Since then he had been across the country three times, and she with him. He had gained a lot of source material for his solidio, and it amused him after a few days when he realized Beti was spying on him for someone. He didn't care, since he had nothing in particular to hide. And, anyway, there were certain joys of which Beti was truly the mistress, despite the vacuum which seemed to exist inside her skull.

"You *are* wonderful," Beti said again.

Dorlup patted her hand without real affection. "Everyone in here thinks I have a system. *The* system to beat the game, I might add. There is only one system. I know that system. Roulette wouldn't have a chance where we come from."

"It all rides on eight, black," Dorlup told the croupier.

"All?" The man's polish had

cracked.

"All."

"Eight black," the croupier intoned a moment later. The crowd ooh'ed and aah'ed.

"Well," said Dorlup, and gathered in the chips again.

"Mr. Dorlup?" someone at his shoulder asked.

"Yes, I am Dorlup. What do you want?"

"Come with me."

"What for?"

"Don't make a scene, Mr. Dorlup," the man said in a soft voice. Then in a language which Dorlup had not heard for six months: "It is important that I talk with you."

Dorlup's eyes bulged. "You're an Agent?"

"Come with me, please."

Dorlup told Beti to play with his chips, then followed the man from the gambling room into the bar.

"Scotch," said Dorlup with a smile. "Might as well be your treat, eh?"

"Two scotches, then," said the man. "You're in serious trouble, Dorlup."

"Is that so?"

"Quite. For a long time the Century Agents have played down stories about a time-tinkerer who had broken more rules than all the tinkerers before him. He was called the monopolist of despotism, al-

though frankly the Agents neither invented nor particularly cared for the term. We played down the stories but we hardly doubted them. As I said, you are in trouble, Dorlup. You are under arrest."

"This is fantastic. What's the charge?"

"Time tinkering, of course. You are the monopolist, Dorlup."

"What? WHAT?"

"You are the monopolist."

Beti played with Dorlup's chips until not one remained in front of her. The croupier was his old self again, calm, detached, indifferent. She looked all around the club for Dorlup but couldn't find him.

No doubt the stranger had been an Agent. Beti hardly understood all that had happened in the last few months. First they told her to spy on Dorlup and she had—gladly, since she had done other small jobs for them in the past and the pay was good. *I'm not as dumb as he thinks*, she thought with a smile. And then, then they had told her to lie in her reports. She had lied cheerfully, at their direction. But why did they need to spy if she spied and found nothing, then reported all sorts of things? She shrugged her shapely shoulders. They had their reasons.

They also had Dorlup, she concluded. Then her job was finished.

She had a drink, listened to a sultry-voiced girl render the latest popular song, and went outside into the cool night air. A sleek car roared to a quick stop in front of her. The back door opened. "Get in," someone said in the darkness.

She hesitated. Hands reached out, tugged at her, pulled her. She was too surprised to try fighting them off, but they were big, strong hands and it would have been futile anyway. She was deposited on the back seat of the car, between two men. The one on her right she had never seen before. She had seen pictures of the one on her left, the handsome man who was approaching middle age so attractively.

He was Mulid Ruscar, Chief of the Century Agents.

"WHERE'S my father?" Laniq demanded.

"I'll take you to him." The man led them down a street lined with prefabricated, Quonset-like houses. People smiled at Laniq, but wanly—and most of the houses were deserted.

An old man shook his head sadly, said, "There was great carnage in Afghanistan. We don't know how it happened; we can only guess. Someone was followed, despite all our efforts."

They walked on, came at last

to one of the prefabricated dwellings which seemed no different from all the others. It was late autumn, 1954, but here in southern Nevada, warm winds swept uncomfortably through the dusty street.

A short, stocky man met them at the door. "You'll have to be quiet," he said.

"Dr. Jangor, how is my father?"

"Badly hurt, I'm afraid. He'll live, but we had to amputate his right leg above the knee. Come in, child."

Tedor followed Laniq awkwardly inside.

"He's in there," the doctor said, pointing to a closed door.

"I'd better wait outside," Tedor told Laniq.

"No, I want you with me."

Shrugging, Tedor followed her within the room. His head propped on pillows, a man lay in the single bed. He was neither awake, nor asleep, but in that half-way state, semi-conscious, dreamy, yet extremely lucid.

"He's been doped against the pain," said Dr. Jangor, and closed the door behind him.

"Dad," Laniq called softly.

The head on the pillow stirred. Sweat beaded the skin, ran into the eyes and made them squint.

"Dad, it's Laniq."

The lips hardly moved, but

Tedor heard: "La-niq? Laniq, you've come back."

She knelt by the bed, let her hand rest on her father's feverish brow. "It's all right now, Dad. Everything's going to be all right."

"They destroyed the starship, Laniq. Completely. We — don't have that way out any longer. We've got to beat the monopolist in Russia. It's his last chance." Dominique Hadrien spoke without heat, with no emotion at all. The words spilled from his lips one after the other, tonelessly. "We have beaten him all along the line, without even knowing his identity. But he has the best chance in Russia and knows it.

"We approach 1955, the crucial year. I said it was the monopolist's last chance. Well, it is ours as well. If he wins in Russia, if he goes on to unite the whole 20th century world as a Russian slave state, then he's on his way toward ultimate conquest of all time. Think of the power at his disposal: an Army to be drawn from two and a half billion people. We must stop him.

"Who is with you, Laniq?"

"A friend," Laniq assured him. "You can talk."

"I—I know what we have to do. A one-legged man, recuperating, isn't good for much. Someone must go to Russia and—"

"I can go," Tedor said. "I have contacts there. Century Agents."

"I'll go with you," Laniq told him.

"You'll stay right here."

"Yes? What would you do in Russia?"

"Well—"

"Do you have a plan?"

"Of course not—yet. But I could see what's happening—"

DOMIQUE Hadrien seemed more clearly awake, more alert. "Nonsense, young man. When it comes to intrigue, Laniq is as capable as a man. Further, she knows what we've been planning all along."

"What's that?"

"If you're familiar with their recent history, you'll recall that their former dictator, Stalin, died early last year. The new premier, Malenkov, is a man to his people, where Stalin was a god. With their effective propaganda-indoctrination machines, I don't doubt Malenkov will one day also be regarded almost as a deity—if we give them time. That's what the monopolist wants, naturally. It's a necessary part of his plans. But Chenkov, the new Army Chief is backed by a strong military clique which would like him and not Malenkov to assume the mantle of godhood. As for the people, they

were willing to take what Stalin dished out because Stalin was their god; but Malenkov is not only a man but a hated half-Tartar, and the people grumble whenever they have to tighten their belts another notch.

"So, Malenkov will one day have godhood. That was their original plan, but there is another development paralleling it. Wild claims have come out of Russia, rumors, whispered talk—all saying that Stalin, miraculously, is living again. It's sheer imagination, I suspect. It's an attempt to pan a make-believe Stalin off on the people in case Malenkov falls on his face while playing God."

"Then we go to Moscow," said Tedor, "as Russians, of course. We must discredit Malenkov where possible, disprove the Stalin-rebirth theory—"

"And incite the people to revolt," Laniq finished for him.

"Well," said Tedor, and smiled.

"It isn't as difficult as it looks, although I think I'd rather go hunting for lions with my bare hands. You see, I've been to Russia before, several times, and for the same reason. I have a fictitious identity there, which I assume on arrival. I've managed to snag a few top men as — uh, admirers. That includes Vladimir Chenkov, by the way."

"Sounds better already. You stay with your father," said Tedor, "for a while. I'm taking a trip up to New York to get some information from our Century Agent there. Then I'll return, pick up one female intriguer out here in Nevada, and we'll be on our way. Take care of yourselves." And Tedor left.

"Nice chap," Hadrien told his daughter.

She smiled at him. "You know something Dad? I'm just beginning to realize that. Very nice."

THE office was on the twenty-third floor of a big office building in mid-town New York, room 2307. It came with all the standard equipment, desks, filing cabinets, chairs, phones, an attractive secretary.

"I'd like to see Mr. Sertant," Tedor told the secretary, who was leafing through one magazine with half a dozen others waiting their turn.

"Isn't a very busy office," she told him flushing slightly.

"I didn't think it would be."

"You know Mr. Sertant?"

"We're old friends," Tedor assured her. It wasn't the truth, for he'd never met Sertant, although he had heard of the Agent.

"Then can you do me a favor, Mister?"

"Maybe."

"What does he do? I mean, what's, Mr. Sertant's business? The way he snoops around people sometimes, you'd think he was a private detective. You know, like Mike Hammer?"

"You might call him that."

"I just wanted to know if I could tell my friends I'm working for a private detective or what, but Mr. Sertant doesn't ever tell me what he does. I just sit here in case anyone comes. Who shall I say is calling, sir?"

"Mr. Barwan. Tedor Barwan."

"Umm." The girl said nothing, but she scowled while trying to write Tedor's name on a pad.

"T-e-d-o-r-space-B-a-r-w-a-n," he spelled it out for her.

"Are you Turkish, Mr. Barwan? It sounds maybe like it's Turkish."

"No."

"Mr. Sertant has a funny name, too. Sertant. Excuse me please, Mister."

"That's all right."

"I'd better tell Mr. Sertant you are here." She flicked the intercom, and Tedor could hear a buzzer dimly in the inner office. "Mr. Sertant? There's a Mr. Tedor Barwan to see you . . . Yes, sir . . . You go right on in, Mr. Barwan,"

TEDOR thanked her, pushed through the gate, opened the

door to Sertant's office, closed it behind him. Sertant got up from his desk, an Agent somewhat younger than Tedor, with red hair and very fair, almost livid skin.

"Your identification please, Barwan."

Tedor gave his papers to Sertant.

"Excellent. It's quite a coincidence you dropped in, Barwan. We've been looking for you."

"Really?"

"It will save us a lot of work."

Tedor was about to ask why, but Sertant began answering the question before he had the opportunity to ask it. Sertant reached into a draw of his desk, his hand emerging swiftly and with clear purpose, grasping a 20th century automatic pistol with comfortable familiarity and pointing it at Tedor.

"Sit down, Barwan."

Tedor sat.

"You're under arrest."

"This is crazy," Tedor snorted. "What for? By what authority? I think I outrank you as an Agent, anyway."

"I don't doubt you do."

"Then you can't arrest me."

"This gun says I can. I also have orders which say I can." With his free hand Sertant groped about the top of his desk, never letting his eye leave Tedor. Presently he

found a sheet of paper tucked under his blotter, passed it across the desk-top.

Tedor scanned it quickly, and with mounting incredulity. It proclaimed:

**HEADQUARTERS
CENTURY AGENTS
OFFICE OF THE CHIEF**

To all Agents, all centuries: Important. Century Agent C-20 Tedor Barwan — now on vacation, whenabouts unknown—is to be detained on sight for possible connection with or knowledge of serious case of time tinkering. Signed. Mulid Ruscar, Chief.

"It's Ruscar's signature," said Tedor, "but I still say you can't hold me."

"This gun says I can," Sertant repeated. "I'm sorry, Barwan, but those are my orders. I hardly know anything about it myself, although something seems to be popping right here in this century."

Tedor began to think of getting away. It was something to think about, but not at the moment, for Sertant seemed on the point of telling him something which might be of value.

"Ruscar is here, right here in Twenty. It appears whatever is happening is sufficiently important to demand his presence."

"Well, then, what's happening?"

"My friend, that is what Rus-

car will want to ask you. Actually, I don't know. So I'll simply have to detain you until Ruscar gets here—which could be soon. It could also be several weeks."

Tedor did not like the idea of an indefinite wait. He eyed Sertant speculatively wondered just how much experience the young Agent had with the obsolete pistol—how much he had, in fact with violence of any sort.

Tedor calculated the distance between them. Six feet, with Sertant sitting comfortably behind the desk, elbow propped on its surface, gun in hand; Tedor standing in front of the desk, shifting his weight uncomfortably from one foot to the other.

The desk? Tedor considered. It wasn't too heavy, but it also did not give him much of a handhold. If he could duck, grasp it firmly, spill it over on top of Sertant . . .

Sertant settled the problem himself. He stood up, came around the side of the desk and stopped near Tedor. "I really should put this antique weapon away," he admitted. "After all, we Agents can trust one another, and Ruscar probably wants you only for information on something."

Tedor shrugged, beginning to feel like a heel, but realizing it was necessary. "Then why don't you?"

SERTANT looked at the gun uncertainly, but continued holding it, the muzzle pointed half at Tedor and half at the floor. "You are going to be a headache," he said. "Obviously, I can't lock you in any of the 20th century jails. The natives would want reasons and I don't have the authority, anyway."

"Then why don't you let me go—provided I promise to remain in the 20th century until I see Ruscar?" Tedor realized he could cheerfully make such a promise and keep it, for if they uncovered and defeated the monopolist in Russia, Ruscar assuredly would want to hear of it.

Sertant shook his head. "Since Ruscar issued this directive for you personally, I have to detain you."

At that moment, Sertant's office-intercom buzzed. Sertant leaned across the desk, his eyes still on Tedor, and flicked a switch. Tedor heard the secretary's voice.

"Mr. Sertant, I'd like to see you about something."

"What?" Sertant demanded irritably.

"Your correspondence to Mr. Hoblan in Cairo."

Hoblan's name was familiar to Tedor. C-20, middle-east, as he recalled.

"Umm, yes. That can't wait.

Come on in, Miss Peterson."

The door soon opened. Sertant averted his eyes from Tedor for an instant, looked at Miss Peterson."

Tedor leaped at him. The gun roared deafeningly, brought a cascade of plaster down from the ceiling. Miss Peterson screamed.

Then Tedor was grappling with Sertant, forcing him back over the edge of the desk, and twisting the hand that held the gun. Miss Peterson disappeared, on her way to notify the local police in all probability.

Tedor twisted savagely, heard something snap. Sertant cursed; the gun clattered to the desk-top, then to the floor, but Sertant's hand was at Tedor's throat, choking him. Abruptly Tedor relaxed, permitting Sertant to straighten away from the desk. Tedor swung his right hand in a short clubbing blow which chopped at Sertant's chin. It broke Sertant's choking hold, opened Sertant's guard so Tedor could pound two swift blows at his stomach.

Sertant doubled over, got thrust upright again by a hard left cross which loosened his teeth and sent two of them flying from his mouth with a spray of blood. Sertant gurgled, covered head with hands and slumped on the desk.

Tedor left the office, tidying his

clothing. In the outer room he passed a near-hysterical Miss Peterson, who had just returned the phone to its cradle.

"Better get him some water," Tedor told her. "Cold water. And tell him I'm sorry. Tell him I'm an Agent, doing an Agent's job and nothing, not even Ruscar, can delay it. Tell him Ruscar can find me in Moscow if he really wants me."

"M-moscow?"

"Moscow." Tedor closed the door behind him.

DORLUP was sweating. Naturally, he had nothing to hide; he had done nothing which could call the Agents down on him. "I don't know what you're talking about," he repeated for the fifth time.

"We'll see about that. We have a sworn statement by this solidio actress—"

"Beti? That's insane. Beti's been with me for months, I admit that; but my behavior has always been within the limits of the law. Why man, the natives accept me as one of their own."

"That's what you say."

"Yes it is. I challenge you to prove otherwise."

"We already have. The actress' testimony is enough to condemn you."

"I demand that my legal advocate be notified."

"He will, when you're returned to the future for trial."

The door to the small room opened. Tall, slender, self-assured, Mulid Ruscar entered with another man.

"It's done," the other man said.

"We have her statement," said Ruscar. "You can send this one back any time—and just a minute! Something's coming over your teletype. This primitive communications . . ."

The man who had been questioning Dorlup walked to a bulky piece of machinery which was clicking excitedly in a corner of the room. He peered in through the metal case, read:

HEADQUARTERS EASTERN
UNITED STATES DISTRICT
COLON URGENT EXCLAMA-
TION POINT IS RUSCAR
PRESENT QUESTION PLEASE
HAVE HIM CONTACT ME IM-
MEDIATELY REGARDING TE-
DOR BARWAN PERIOD BAR-
WAN WAS HERE BUT MAN-
AGED TO ESCAPE CMM
TRICKING AND OVERPOW-
ERING ME PERIOD BARWAN
ASSERTED INTENTIONS OF
VISITING MOSCOW USSR
CMM PURPOSE OF VISIT UN-
KNOWN PERIOD PLEASE NO-
TIFY PERIOD JELDON SER-

TANT C TWENTY NEUSA
CMM NEW YORK NY END

"Barwan's slipped through our fingers again," the man said bitterly.

Ruscar frowned at him. "Actually, you're jumping to conclusions concerning Tedor. He's a good man, one of the best Agents we've got."

"That's just it, Chief. That's exactly it. He's been so well indoctrinated in Agenting, he'll never play along with us."

"No, Who do you think it was who indoctrinated Tedor? I did. I believed that way myself, you know. If I changed my mind, perhaps I can change Tedor's. I'd certainly like to, because we can use Tedor."

"Well, you can take this Dorlup thing from here. The girl has had an unfortunate accident. She's dead. But we have her statement, and it should hold up in a court of law."

"Dead!" Dorlup cried, not understanding what was going on.

"Take him out of here," Ruscar said, and someone removed Dorlup from the room.

"Now, then," Ruscar continued. "Return to our century with him. Press charges. Make an astonishing revelation, as it were. We doubted the existence of a monopolist of despotism, but we're not

infallible. We were wrong. Dorlup is the monopolist, and we have proof."

"Poor Dorlup."

"One of those things. We needed a scapegoat, because too many people were beginning to demand action regarding Dominique Hadrien's claims. Too bad we couldn't stick it on Hadrien himself; that would be taking care of two things at once."

"About Barwan, tell Sertant to forget it. If Barwan's on his way to Moscow, then we can only assume he's thrown in completely with Dominique Hadrien and his followers. That doesn't mean it's irrevocable, for I'm going to Moscow myself. I'd like to have Barwan with us, as you know. If not—well, no one man is indispensable."

In the next room, meanwhile, Dorlup was fuming. His whole orientation toward what had happened had been drastically altered in the last few moments. It was not a mistake, hardly a mistake at all.

A plot?

A plot, decidedly. Dorlup was being used as—what was the 20th century term he had picked up?—as a fall guy. He'd have none of it. Not Dorlup. At first he hardly knew how to straighten it out, but if Ruscar wouldn't help—

he had counted on Ruscar and now it seemed Ruscar was behind everything—then Dorlup had only one place to turn. He smiled grimly. After what had happened at the Eradrome, he never thought he'd go to Tedor Barwan for anything.

The guard kept one eye on Dorlup, and at the same time tried to listen, through a partially opened door to the conservation in the next room. Dorlup picked up a chair when he was convinced all the guard's attentions were centered on the other room. He swung the chair like a four-stemmed club, shattering it over the guard's head. Feet pounded in the next room, but Dorlup was on his way out.

Shots barked in the darkness, and once a parabeam zipped past Dorlup. But he kept on running and he found a car at the head of the driveway. Not only were the keys in the ignition, the engine was idling. Dorlup sprung inside for all his massive bulk and had gunned the automobile out toward the main highway before another car started in pursuit.

Heading for the road to Reno and his time-conveyor, Dorlup wondered how he could approach Tedor Barwan in Moscow—if, indeed Tedor was on his way there. Well, Dorlup knew a man in the Spasso House, the American Em-

bassy fronting on Red Square. He was an expatriate time-traveler who had decided to remain in the 20th century as one of its citizens—something growing more common every day. Perhaps he could help Dorlup . . .

If he ever got to his time-conveyor, let alone Moscow.

Headlights blazed in his rear-view mirror. He pressed his right foot down on the accelerator, as far as it would go. The lights did not fade, nor did they grow brighter.

“IT can't really be him,” Georgi Malenkov told the Comrade Doctor in obvious distaste.

“I assure you, Comrade Premier it is he.”

Malenkov walked ponderously to a bar in the corner, poured himself two ounces of vodka and drank them straight. His suite was far within the walls of the Kremlin, so deep and so well hidden, in fact that not fifty people in all of Moscow knew its location. For Stalin this had not been necessary, Malenkov thought uncomfortably. His suite had been secret, true enough—but thousands of people had known its location. With Malenkov it was different. He could trust no one—no one. He never knew a man could feel so completely alone, so helpless at night and

afraid to sleep. Every time he saw Vladimir Chenkov's lean, gaunt face he went almost sick with fear.

Chenkov, grim, deadly Chief of Staff of the Red Army, who had arisen from Ural obscurity to power only this year—Chenkov coveted what he did.

Not Chenkov alone. Everyone. Why, he couldn't even trust his servants—two men and a woman who never saw the light of day, never ventured from his suite in the Kremlin.

He was not Stalin, not the Iron Man, not the half-deity. He was Malenkov, the man, the fat half-Tartar — and afraid. He had thought at first that in a matter of months he could cement his position securely enough to venture forth without fear. But here it was, more than a year and a half since he had taken office and he had still to drive along the private Highway and use his private dacha to the south for a few days of relaxation.

Fortified with the vodka, Malenkov scowled at the Comrade Doctor. "I won't ask you to explain—such explanations are beyond me. You say it is he. Very well, but hear this: if you are lying, if you are wrong—lying or not—your life shall be forfeit."

The Comrade Doctor shrugged. "I spoke the truth."

Everyone was against him, Malenkov sulked. Everyone. Now even a ghost. "How long will he live—uh, he *is* living?"

"The answer to the second question, Comrade Premier, is yes. He is alive, although the manner of life is decidedly unusual. As for the first question, does the Premier want a truthful answer?"

"I insist upon it," said Malenkov, who now desired more vodka, but thought it a matter of impropriety to return to the bar and so call the Comrade Doctor's attention to the fact that he drank heavily. Such things had a way of getting out and causing trouble. Perhaps Chenkov would know some way to use it as a weapon.

"Then, I do not know. I can promise nothing. He is alive now—in a very special sort of way. How long he will live I cannot predict. He might die in a minute, an hour, a year—he might live, if properly cared for, for an eternity. He—"

The phone buzzed. Malenkov shuddered, jumped. It had sounded so loud. He must have them mute the phones.

"This is the Comrade Premier," he said.

"Comrade Zhubin, the bio-chemist, Comrade Premier."

Zhubin. Malenkov's heart pounded. "Go ahead, Zhubin."

"He is calling for you."

"Already?" Malenkov was hoarse, found it difficult to swallow. "How long has he been calling for me?"

"Several minutes. He is laughing as if something is quite funny."

Malenkov said he would be right there, returned the phone to its hook. He shuddered again. The thought of the thing in its small round glass case was terrible. Should he tell the people? Already rumors were afoot. Who couldn't he trust? The Comrade Doctor. Shuddering was becoming habitual. He *had* to trust the Comrade Doctor, or die of fright every time he got the sniffles. The Comrade bio-chemist, Zhubin? But Zhubin had the thing in the glass case and might be considered the second most important man in the Communist hierarchy.

Then who was first?

Malenkov?

The thing in the glass case?

Shuddering Malenkov bid the Comrade Doctor make himself comfortable. He excused himself, entered the hall and started walking. Who was first? He suddenly remembered something. Malenkov was not first, nor was the thing in the case. Someone else—someone none of the Russians knew anything about, except for Malenkov, and Stalin before him, and

perhaps one or two others.

But Mulid Ruscar, the quiet man impossibly (and yet it was so) from the future, preferred to remain in the background.

After all, hadn't the thing in the glass case been Ruscar's idea?

"BUT of course, Vladimir, my dear—of course I missed you! Could it be otherwise, ever?"

Laniq sat curled on a chair, talking into the telephone. Her transformation had been amazing, thought Tedor. Not many hours before, they had set their conveyor down a score of miles south of Moscow, in a heavily wooded area. Dressed like city folk and equipped with all the counterfeit documents they needed, they had confiscated an auto (Laniq's forged paper placed them high in the Communist nobility) and motored to Moscow.

There they entered the apartment Laniq maintained, Laniq excused herself, left Tedor in the living room with some good vodka, and went into the bedroom to change her clothing.

Tedor had to whistle when she returned.

The gown clung to her body, dazzling white, patterned with gems, slashed boldly from throat to waist revealing Laniq's shapely breasts as much as it concealed

them, revealing and concealing in a breathless rhythm as she moved about. The skirt also was slit on one side to mid-thigh.

"I'm going to call Chenkov and have dinner with him," Laniq had said. "Find out what's going on."

For answer, Tedor took her in his arms and kissed her. It was one of those things, a sudden impulse which he regretted in the first split second. Regret turned to delight. Laniq seemed surprised, tried to pull away, but all at once her lips melted under his, her arms were flung about his neck, her body thrust against him.

"Laniq," he had murmured. "Laniq, I—"

"Shh!" And they were kissing again.

"Laniq—it's crazy, wild, impossible. We hardly know each other, we . . . I came into time looking for you wanting to kill you!"

"We have been through all of civilization together. I know you for five thousand years. Umm-mm, don't stop, Tedor."

And he hadn't, not for a long time. She burned like fire and she cooled like a clear mountain lake on a hot summer day and Tedor had whispered in the dark, "I love you, Laniq."

"Tedor! I love you. Tell me again."

"I love you."

And afterwards, he had prepared drinks and they toasted the future and discussed plans and then Laniq had gone to the telephone and called Chenkov.

"I have to see you, Vladimir. I missed you every minute." Tedor stood nearby; she kissed the tip of his nose.

Tedor was so close he heard the voice faintly over the receiver. "I'm busy, but I'll put it aside. Dinner and then my dacha for the night, darling Anna."

That was Laniq's name here in Russia, Anna Myinkov. As Anna Myinkov she had on previous visits captivated the hearts of Chenkov and others. Only fat Georgi Malenkov, she had told Tedor, had been impossibly aloof. Of course, the extent of her captivation was information. She could learn what was happening, but Tedor somehow would have to put it to use.

"I'll pick you up in an hour, Anna."

"An hour, then," and Laniq cut the connection, turning into Tedor's arms.

Tedor scowled. "Just what—happens at his dacha?"

Laniq laughed softly. "Silly Tedor, we're not married yet." But her eyes were twinkling.

"What happens?"

"You leave that to me, but I

can tell you this: if I gave Chenkov what he could get, and gladly, from any Russian beauty, he'd tire of me."

"Just what do you do?"

Laniq practiced some exaggerated bumps and grinds like those Tedor had often seen in the Eradrome. "Enough, but not too much. Listen, Tedor—you'd better be on your way in a few minutes. What happens if Chenkov finds you here?"

Grumbling, Tedor picked up his fur-lined coat and Russian pile-cap. "There's a man at the Spasso House," he told her. "Someone who decided he liked the twentieth century better than our own, counterfeited a birth certificate, deposited it in an American department of health some thirty years ago and took up citizenship there. He went into state department work and is here in Moscow now.

"You get what information you can from Chenkov. I'll see my friend. We'll compare notes and decide what to do. Laniq—I want you to — well, be careful, that's all."

"Well . . ." Laniq smiled at him.

"I'm not joking. Maybe that gown kind of hurried what I felt all along, but it was coming, Laniq. I loved you from the beginning but didn't know it. Laniq, be careful."

"You can come back and sleep here tonight if you want. I'll see you in the morning. And you know I'll be careful, Tedor. Now that I've found you I want to keep you—and I want to stay healthy enough to appreciate what I've got."

The phone rang.

"Hello, this is Anna Myinkov. Yes? Oh, yes, Vladimir. My, but that was fast. Of course." Laniq hung up, shoved Tedor toward the door. "Get out of here, quick! Chenkov's suite of rooms when he's not in the Kremlin or his dracha is in a hotel down the street. He's early. He's on his way up right now. Scram!"

Tedor kissed her quickly, stalked out into the hall and waited for the elevator. A middle-aged man got off—wearing the uniform of a Red Army marshal, carrying a large bouquet of flowers.

"You should have doffed your hat," the female elevator operator admonished Tedor as they started down. "That was Marshal Chenkov."

"Don't I know it," said Tedor.

"BARWAN! This is a surprise. Come in, come in."

The Spasso House, the American Embassy adjacent to Red Square, was a gaunt, grim structure. Frawdin Chlon—Harry Marsden now—

was a man of about Tedor's age, but shorter, fair of skin and hair and quite calm and self-possessed in an American business suit.

"We were about to close for the day, Barwan. But this is a surprise."

"How are you, Frawdin—no, I guess it had better be Harry."

"You're telling me! Fine, thank you. It's quite a coincidence, because I had another visitor earlier today. He says he knows you and wanted to see you, but I had no idea you were in Moscow."

"Who was that?"

"A solidio writer, name of Dorlup."

"Dorlup?" Tedor frowned.

"He claims to be in some kind of trouble and says he has a story to tell which would make your hair stand on end."

"He has a habit of doing that. Do you have his address?"

Marsden nodded, then asked: "What brings you here?"

"It's a long story, and since you are working for the American government now, I don't think I'd better tell you. Not that anything I plan doing will hurt America—far from it. But you know about time-travel and the way we have to do everything in secret. All I want is some information, anyway. What's the current international state of affairs?"

"I wish I knew, Tedor. Frankly, I'm worried. The Russians have massed three million troops on their European border, another million to the east, north of the Yellow Sea. Their big planes, capable of delivering anything including atomic weapons a third of the way around the world, are lined up on a 'round-the-clock stand-by basis at half a dozen airfields; there's talk they'll be used soon. Everything seems to hinge on something happening in the Kremlin right now. There's talk, wild rumors, but nothing official."

"What are the rumors about?"

"You'll think this is silly, but they're from usually reliable sources. They claim Stalin has come back to life."

"What!"

"That's right. Stalin has come back, sort of like a totalitarian Communist Messiah. All people have a culture-hero who's supposed to come back in times of trouble and lead his nation to glory. Even though Stalin's been gone only a year and a half, he's the Russian culture-hero. If somehow they can rig up a setup—the men in the Kremlin, I mean—which convinces the people he has come back and wants war, there's no telling what Russia might do."

"But does the Kremlin want war?"

Marsden shrugged. "It might be necessary to keep power. The people don't like their government, although they tolerated it under Stalin because he managed to convince them he was something of a deity. But if the government can turn the people to an exterior trouble, namely a world war, the government would stay in power. It depends on what these rumors are all about."

"And don't you know?"

"No."

"Okay, Harry. Thanks. Listen, don't tell Dorlup I was here if he should call you. I'll get in touch with him when I have a chance."

Marsden gave Tedor an address where Dorlup could be reached, told him they'd have to have lunch together some time, then led him to the door.

VLADIMIR Chenkov's dacha—his big estate at the far end of the private highway some thirty-odd miles south of Moscow—almost had the proportions of a palace. It was big all over, with huge rooms, high ceilings, half a dozen fireplaces, two grand pianos, ponderous, overstuffed furniture and eight private bedrooms, each easily large enough to accommodate four people although each contained only one oversized bed.

You're a strange girl, Anna," said Chenkov, sitting with her on bearskins near the fireplace and trying to maneuver in such a way that when she grew tired her head would naturally fall into his lap.

"Oh, I like you—yes. Don't misunderstand. But at times you are so—cold."

"You're married, Vladimir, and sometimes I think of your wife and think of how I would feel under similar circumstances."

"That is all?"

"Well—"

"Then listen to me, Anna. What is a wife? A man has a wife because it is conventional, like a country says it is striving for peace when often it must have war to keep from flying apart. I can get you anything, anything. I could treat you like no wife ever was treated. Here, you like this dacha? Say the word and it is yours."

Servants came with vodka, champagne, paper-thin slices of sturgeon, caviar. Chenkov nibbled at the sturgeon while Laniq had some caviar and champagne. Chenkov began drinking vodka and hardly paused until, Laniq realized, he was high enough to be uninhibited, yet not sufficiently high to be a boor. It was the gentlemanly thing in Russian nobility, Laniq knew.

"Do you not even feel inclined to kiss me tonight, my Anna?"

Laniq offered her lips without heat, got them bruised by Chenkov's teeth.

"Then at least dance for me, Anna."

She had danced for him before, here in this very dacha, at the same fireplace. But now it was different, now she could not feel the same emotional indifference and so whet Chenkov's appetite sufficiently for him to start talking.

Laniq got up and did a tentative pirouette.

"Come now."

Laniq danced slowly, spinning and dipping and feeling terribly sorry for herself. But the firelight was warm and the champagne, and the whole room seemed to go out of focus except for Chenkov's hungry eyes, which became enormous—and in Laniq's own time the dance was something to be done because you loved doing it, and except for Chenkov's eyes she might dance with abandon and enjoy herself.

Tedor, she thought. *Tedor* . . .

IF she closed her own eyes she thought, almost, she was dancing for him and not for Chenkov. The slit skirt swirled around her flashing thighs; the bodice, slash-

ed from throat to waist, clung and fell away, clung and fell away.

She danced not for Chenkov but for Tedor—and then not for Tedor but for all the people in the world who might live in freedom if Chenkov's tongue loosened. But the hands which reached up for her legs and pulled her down were Chenkov's.

"Tell me," she said breathlessly while Chenkov tried to paw her and she scampered away to fill a large glass with vodka for him and a small one with champagne for herself. "Tell me, are you as important a man as I hear?"

"My dear Anna! You're jesting."

"No I mean it. I'm only a country girl, really I am, and I'd —"

"You? A country bumpkin. That's good, that's splendid. Well, then I will tell you. I am number two man in all the realm, and . . ."

Laniq pouted.

"Don't cry. Don't. I will one day be number one man, I know it. You may rest assured of that. I could show you things, so many things which would make your beautiful hair stand on end."

"Then show me!"

"Very well—I shall, my Anna."

"Show me how you can do anything, anything you want in all of Moscow."

"And in the Kremlin, too," Chenkov said thickly. "Yes, in the Kremlin. Tomorrow morning I will take you to see something you never dreamed of. Tomorrow morning . . ." He kissed her wetly, too far gone with vodka.

"Tomorrow morning then. I'm sleepy." And Laniq stood up, brushed his fumbling hands away from her, climbed the stairs to the second floor, retreated to a bedroom and bolted the door behind her. Chenkov was soon stomping up the stairs and banging insistently at the door.

"Tomorrow," Laniq whispered, and repeated it when Chenkov protested. "I said tomorrow."

"But Anna—"

"You show me what you can do. After all, I don't want to be a fly-by-night mistress of this dacha. Good night, Vladimir."

"Good night, then. Tomorrow morning—and tomorrow night."

THEY always tried to bring Chenkov in on everything. *They* actually had more power than people on the outside could imagine, Malenkov thought petulantly. They numbered only two-score but they were his cabinet of ministers and sub-ministers and it seemed — ridiculously — that he had to answer to them for everything. "But why don't we forget

about Vladimir?" Malenkov pleaded, "who must certainly be kept busy with his Army work?"

"Vladimir will come. Stalin would have wanted it that way."

Stalin, in truth, had asked for Chenkov as well as Malenkov. Stalin. Malenkov trembled when he thought of it. That was not Stalin—that was nobody. A thing, not a person. It spoke even with a mechanical voice. Stalin—the Old Stalin—never answered to a cabinet of ministers and sub-ministers. As for the new Stalin, the strange horrible thing which the bio-chemist, Zhubin, insisted was Stalin, there was no telling what he would want or demand. Malenkov wished passionately he could get his hands around Zhubin's scrawny neck and choke the life from him. This was all Zhubin's fault.

Not really, for Mulid Ruscar couldn't be discounted. Why did everything happen this way? Why did men from the future even insist on poking their noses into his, Malenkov's business? But why was any of this Ruscar's affair, anyway? Ruscar seemed to hold the whip-hand. Ruscar told them what to do, and they did it. Ruscar knew political intrigue as well as a Chenkov, bio-chemistry as well as a Zhubin—for was it not Ruscar who had helped, paved the way, in fact, for Zhubin to con-

struct the monster masquerading as a resurrected Stalin? As if a hideous, naked thing in a glass cage could be a man of flesh and blood and think like a man.

"Hurry, Comrade Premier. Ruscar is waiting and Stalin with him."

Ruscar—and Stalin. But Ruscar had not been born yet, and would not be, for thousands of years. Stalin? Stalin was dead.

"I do not feel well," said Malenkov. "Summon the Comrade Doctor."

"I am here, Comrade Premier. I will go with you to the meeting. A slight sedative will perhaps—"

"No! Get that thing away from me!" Malenkov recoiled in terror from the needle which the Comrade Doctor had extended. "I am all right."

Was the Comrade Doctor in the employ of Chenkov to poison him? Was he in the employ of Ruscar for some nameless purpose? Or of Zhubin, the bio-chemist, to transform Malenkov also into a pink thing floating in ghastly fluid in a little glass container?

Almost blubbing as he walked toward the laboratory, Malenkov could feel the weight of Communist Empire, crushing him like a worm to the floor.

"I've never been in the Kremlin," Laniq told Chenkov as they hurried along the silent hallways

within the walled fortress. She had seen the towers, the minarets, the gaunt walls only briefly from the outside, and then Chenkov had spirited her within the place, although clearly a Red Army guard would have protested had he been anyone but the Chief of Staff.

"I can take you anywhere you want," Chenkov promised, walking beside her, his arm tucked in hers, resembling neither the whip-lash leader of the Army, which he was, nor the romantic lover, which he hoped to be—but rather the obscure military figure who had climbed to glory over the purgeslain bodies of his comrades. He would one day look the part of the field marshal, Laniq thought; at the moment he was trying to convince himself as well as Anna Myinkov of the brightness of his star in the communist firmament.

They reached a heavy metal door flanked by two guards. "Marshal Chenkov!" cried one, and they both saluted with their rifles. The door opened, they went inside.

L ANIQ saw a huge room, a laboratory it seemed—all white porcelain and gleaming chrome. At the far end a group of men clustered about an object which seemed suspended in air and bathed in radiance of gold and amber. The object was cylindrical and

rather small, transparent with a pinkish mass floating inside.

Laniq almost screamed. The thing in the glass container was a human brain.

Chenkov grasped her arm more tightly. "They won't like it when they find I brought you here." He smiled. "They'll probably insist you remain within the Kremlin—with me."

A big, nervous man with flabby jowls and the palest face Laniq had ever seen turned to face them.

"Vladimir," he said, "you're late."

It was Georgi Malenkov.

"Chenkov shrugged. "I am here."

"And your friend?"

"She is that, a friend."

"You shouldn't have brought her. What do you think this is, a circus?"

"It's a private affair. She's harmless."

"I'll summon the guards and have her removed."

"Yes? To whom do you think the guards owe their first allegiance?"

A white-smoked figure turned to look at the newcomers. "Please, Comrades. Let's have none of this squabbling. Stalin wants to talk with us."

"We'll settle this later," grumbled Malenkov.

"There is nothing to settle," said

Chenkov, standing his ground.

Malenkov growled, but looked again at the brain floating in its case. The white-smocked figure adjusted some dials on a table nearby. On the wall behind the glass enclosed brain, a microphone-speaker blared metallicly:

"Are they both here? Malenkov and Chenkov, both of them?"

"Yes," said Zhubin. "Yes, Comrade Stalin. They are here."

"You now know that I live," said the brain. "It is a strange new life I have, but I can think—perhaps more clearly than would otherwise be possible, for I have no body to encumber me. Before I go on, do you have any questions?"

Malenkov blinked his fat-enveloped eyes. Chenkov stared.

"Very well. The day my body died, a quick operation removed the brain and preserved it. Comrade Zhubin—working under the direction of a man you've only seen once or twice—transferred the brain, my brain exactly as it was in life so that when I speak you will know it is Stalin, the Man of Iron, talking, into this case. I have since conferred with the man who made the operation possible, the man who can do great things for Mother Russia, and because talking tires me in some strange way and he knows the situation

more completely at this time than I do, I want you to listen to him as if it were I, Stalin, talking."

There was a silence. The half dozen figures still stood around the brain case, but one of them turned slowly around to look at all the earnest faces. His eyes raked Laniq. "A woman?" he said, incredulously, and his eyes wandered, then darted back. "Laniq Hadrien!" he cried. "Who brought this woman here? Fools! Speak!"

"It was Chenkov," fat Malenkov said spitefully.

"Is that true?" the man demanded.

Chenkov nodded defiantly. "So what?"

"So what? So this, you idiot! That girl is a representative of our most dangerous enemy."

"The United States?" wailed Malenkov.

"Far worse than the United States."

Laniq sprinted for the doorway at the other end of the room, heard the voice call from behind her: "Guards! Stop that woman!"

The speaker was Mulid Ruscar.

WHEN Laniq failed to return Tedor began to worry. It suddenly occurred to him that he might be able to reach Mulid Ruscar for help. True, Ruscar had sent out an order for his arrest, but

directives could be mis-read, transferred incorrectly. Perhaps Ruscar merely needed him urgently. Perhaps Ruscar had realized he would be flitting through the ages and nothing short of arrest would detain him long enough for them to get together. Tedor used his tongue to flick on the tiny transmitter embedded in his palate, then said:

"This is Tedor Barwan calling Mulid Ruscar. Barwan calling Ruscar."

He waited not more than half a minute when the answering voice whispered in his ear. "Tedor, where are you?"

"In Moscow, Chief. I'm sorry I couldn't wait in New York. I have news for you. It's about Laniq Hadrien."

"Laniq? Oh, of course. Laniq Hadrien eh? Where are you?"

Tedor gave Ruscar his address.

"Fine, Tedor. I'll send someone over to fetch you. Stay right there."

"All right, chief." And Tedor cut the connection. Ruscar had a way about him for getting to the bottom of intrigue. Tedor felt better already.

A moment later, the doorbell rang. Ruscar's man? Impossible.

Tedor opened the door and admitted a nervous Dorlup.

"Barwan, thank heaven I found

you. Harry Marsden gave me your address."

Tedor watched guardedly as Dorlup entered the room, sat down on a big chair. "Have you people got any closer to finding the time tyrant?"

Tedor shook his head.

"Let me ask you another question. At the very beginning of all this you were going to write a report. What was it about?"

"The 20th century, of course. I was going to say it seemed that the most aggressive, war-like state here, Russia, was receiving aid from our own time. Fornswitthe started to write it."

"That's what I thought." Dorlup mopped his forehead, although it was comfortably warm in the apartment. "And someone killed him and stole it. You thought I was the only one who could have known where Fornswitthe was living. But someone else knew. Mulid Ruscar knew."

"Of course Ruscar knew," Tedor declared irritably. "That doesn't mean anything. Ruscar is fighting everything the monopolist stands for."

"We'll get back to that. It might interest you to know I'm a fugitive. I escaped from Ruscar in the United States when Ruscar accused me of being the time tyrant."

"I've wondered the same thing myself. But somehow you don't fill the role."

"He has enough phony evidence to make it stick, Barwan. You see, certain people were creating too much of a fuss about the monopolist. It was crimping Ruscar's plans. He figured if he could convict a scapegoat the furor would die down, at least for a while. I was his scapegoat."

Tedor frowned while he poured them both drinks. "It just doesn't make sense. Ruscar all his life has stood for everything the monopolist was trying to tear down."

"Which is exactly why no one ever suspected him."

"I think you're crazy, or lying, or wrong—but we'll find out soon enough. Ruscar knows I'm in Moscow. He's sending someone over, as a matter of fact."

"If Ruscar is sending someone to find you we've got to get out of here!" Dorlup gasped.

"Calm down. We'll do no such thing. We'll wait for Ruscar's man and see what this is all about."

"You'll wait, you mean—if you are stupid enough to aid in your own execution. I'm getting out of here." Dorlup climbed to his feet, but Tedor pushed him back into his chair.

"You're waiting with me, Dorlup. I'd like to find out once and for

all just where you fit into all this."

"Barwan, I came to you in good faith! Give me a chance! Ruscar has enough rigged evidence to have me gassed."

"Sit still and wait."

Dorlup emptied his glass of vodka, reached over to the table and tremblingly poured another.

Seconds later the doorbell rang.

HE was tall, broad of shoulder, wore a snap-brim hat and a concealed weapon which nevertheless bulged on his hip. He showed his credentials. "I am from Army Intelligence," he announced. "The Chief of Staff's Office instructed me personally to escort you to a meeting with a Comrade Ruscar."

"Chief of Staff," said Dorlup. "That would be Chenkov himself. You're a big fish, Barwan."

Tedor wondered if there could be any truth in all that Dorlup had said. Looking at Dorlup now, he realized the man bordered on hysteria, and even if he were indeed well-meaning, he could still have misinterpreted everything. Unlikely—but no less likely than the accusations Dorlup had made against Mulid Ruscar. Perhaps the Intelligence Agent could inadvertently shed light on the entire situation.

Tedor yawned. "I am tired. I think I have changed my mind."

Yes, I'd rather sleep. You tell the Chief of Staff to tell Ruscar I won't see him today, after all."

"But Comrade, I was sent to get you."

"Fine, you're a good man. I'm sending you back without me. Care for a drink before you leave?"

"Thank you, no. I never drink on duty. Comrade, listen; the Chief of Staff would hate to tell Comrade Ruscar that you have changed your mind. I know this for a fact, Comrade."

"Are you trying to say I haven't much choice? I go with you voluntarily or get taken?"

The Intelligence Agent shrugged. "I never said it and you are putting it crudely, even coarsely. But the general assumption is correct."

Still smiling, Tedor reached for the bottle of vodka which stood on a table near the door. The Intelligence Agent stood with one foot inside the apartment, one outside, waiting.

"Go to hell," said Tedor.

The Intelligence Agent reached quickly for his gun. Tedor swung the vodka bottle in a short, savage arc at the right side of the man's face while he fumbled in his pocket for the weapon. The bottle struck his jawbone, shattered. He screamed and fell, his face a red smear.

Tedor dragged him inside the

apartment and shut the door. "Maybe you know what you're talking about, Dorlup. Are you willing to help me prove it?"

"I guess so. Yes, of course!"

Tedor reached into the fallen Intelligence Agent's pocket, found his wallet, his identification card with a picture and his gun. "We'll need this," he said. "Come on."

Laniq's commandeered auto was still parked at the curb downstairs, a crowd of urchins admiring it. "Climb in," Tedor told Dorlup, then walked to a display board down the street, found a poster with Malenkov's picture, quickly removed it and ran for the car. "We're dead ducks if my time conveyor isn't where I left it," he said. "If it's there, we may have a chance."

AND half an hour later:

"So we're in your conveyor. Now what?"

"Sit down," said Tedor. "We've got to hurry."

"But this is the matter duplicator."

Tedor nodded. Each conveyor was equipped with one of the devices—which could print perfect counterfeit money, create clothing, artificial hair, skin tissue, anything to render a visit to past ages as foolproof as possible.

"Whatever you want to copy is or-

dinarily stored on microfilm," Tedor explained. "But this thing can copy anything."

"I know, but what do you want me—"

Tedor thrust the picture of Malenkov into the receiver. "Easy, Dorlup. You're about the right size. Just sit still. You're going to be Georgi Malenkov, Premier of all the Russians."

Five minutes later, Tedor looked at Malenkov rising from the chair. "It's perfect," he said.

"I don't understand."

"You can write solidios, Dorlup; you'd better be able to *act* as well. You're going to be Malenkov."

Tedor sat down himself, placed the Intelligence Agent's ID picture into the duplicator. "I'll be your personal bodyguard," he said—and he was, moments later.

"They've got a friend of mine somewhere," said Tedor. "If Chenkov takes orders from Malenkov, we're going to find out where. We're also going to find out what Ruscar has up his sleeve, provided you're right about him."

"I'm right."

"We'll see. But if you were lying, Dorlup—if you were, I'll kill you myself."

Dorlup blanched. "We don't have to worry about that."

"All right. According to his ID card, this man was Fyodor Archev-

ski. I'm Fyodor Archevski, your guard."

And then they were speeding in Laniq's auto back to Moscow—and the Kremlin.

"**W**HERE do you think you are going? Oh, Comrade Premier. Comrade Malenkov—I am sorry."

Dorlup nodded brusquely at the guard. They drove through the Kremlin gates and up a ramp.

"Do you know your way around this place?" Dorlup demanded.

"No."

Tedor stopped the car. They climbed out, watched as a uniformed figure darted out from a doorway, leaped into the auto, drove it away after saluting them.

Another figure came forward. "May I be of help, Comrade Premier?"

"The Premier wishes an immediate audience with Comrade Chenkov," Tedor told the soldier. "Not in his private quarters but in the nearest available study. Lead us to it and have someone fetch Chenkov. Quickly."

The guard took them up another ramp, through a doorway, down a hall. He led them into a spacious sitting room, soon had the fireplace burning brightly. "I'll get the Marshal myself," he said, and departed.

Tedor looked around, discovered a draped alcove at one end of the room. Peering inside he saw a dressing table and a mirror. "I'll be in here," he said. "Remember, the first thing you want to find out from Chenkov is this: where's Laniq? Her name's Anna Myinkov, and Chenkov knows her, probably saw her yesterday and possibly more recently than that. Afterwards, if Chenkov wants to tell you anything in addition, that'll be fine."

A few moments later, Chenkov stalked angrily into the study. "See here, Georgi! I saw you not half an hour ago in your quarters and now you bring me here. What is it?"

Dorlup cleared his throat. "I wanted some information."

"You sound strange."

"Cold coming on, I think. Vladimir, tell me—what happened to the girl? You know, Anna Myinkov?"

"Why should you be interested in her? Anyway, you *know* what happened. Don't tell me the living brain of Stalin frightened you so much you didn't even see what was going on?"

"Y-yes. That was it, Vladimir."

Chenkov snorted. "And the mantle of powers is yours. Well, Ruscar said Anna was from some enemy force and since she was his enemy

she was also ours. I had a hard time explaining my way out of that one, but Ruscar must have realized I hold enough power here to give him trouble if he tries to give me some. He probably has Anna in the Lubianka Prison and I intend to do something about it, although why you should be interested, I don't know."

Dorlup was a doleful-looking Malenkov, but the features were identical—the tiny eyes, high forehead, thick jowls, petulant lips. Hiding in the dressing alcove, Tedor wondered how long the ruse would hold.

"I was just curious, that's all."

"It seems to me other things should be on your mind. I'm the Chief of Staff, so it's not my problem. But with Ruscar and Stalin —"

"Stalin? I—"

"Stalin's brain, Georgi. His brain. Ruscar resurrected it, not I. If the war goes badly—it shouldn't, but if it does—the people will have a resurrected Stalin to turn to for faith and hope. It was a stroke of genius, I think. But right now you and Molotov should be conferring with the military leaders, getting things ready, planning . . ."

"It's arranged," Dorlup said evasively. "It's all arranged."

"So quickly? That's preposter-

ous. You don't start a vast war-machine functioning in mere hours. We're planning on quick victory with a sudden, devastating atomic attack on the United States."

"I—know."

"I know you know, Georgi. You hardly seem concerned. Even Comrade Zhubin pointed out how nervous you seemed today, and Zhubin usually minds his own business. You seem even worse now."

DORLUP nodded, clearly struggling for words and a way to prolong the conversation. "I—I'm not myself," he said, mopping his brow.

"Well," said Chenkov, irritably, "is that all you wanted me for?"

Dorlup stood there, fidgeting. Chenkov snorted, began to leave the room.

"Just one moment, Comrade Marshal." It was Tedor, who had emerged from behind the drapery.

"Eh? By Lenin, what are *you* doing here Archevski? Am I going crazy? I thought I sent you to find this, uh—Barwan."

"You did, Comrade Marshal, but —"

"But I told him not to," said Dorlup.

"You? What for? Ruscar wanted him brought at once."

"I know that," said Dorlup.

"But the Comrade Premier told

me not to go, anyway. Then Comrade Premier further told me that Ruscar had concluded his usefulness after we had Stalin's resurrected brain. The Comrade Premier—"

"Let him talk for himself, Archevski! And I'll see you later for disobeying my orders."

"No you won't."

"He's in ~~my~~ employ now," Dorlup told Chenkov. "What he was saying is this: why do we need Ruscar? Let Ruscar go back where he came from. We can handle everything ourselves."

"Georgi, you don't mean it."

"I mean it."

"Then you are *not* yourself! You had better see a doctor. Why, only the day before yesterday we spoke with Ruscar about what all this could mean. Defeating the United States we could conquer the earth, of course. But what is the Earth here and now, this year, when with Ruscar's help we can have all Earth, through all the centuries, for all time?"

"What makes you think we can trust this Ruscar?"

"That's fantastic. Everything is arranged. Perhaps later, much later—after we have consolidated our position in time, then we can think of doing without Ruscar's help. But not now."

"Well—" said Dorlup, at a loss

for words.

The door opened. It was Georgi Malenkov who stood there.

"VLADIMIR, I was told I could find you here in conference with someone, they didn't know who. They — Vladimir!" Malenkov looked at Dorlup. His small eyes bulged.

Chenkov's mouth dropped open. "This is impossible!"

"Vladimir, please. Please. I see it now. I see it all—" Malenkov had grown pale staring at his duplicate. "You have this double. You and Ruscar. You plan to do away with me and keep a figurehead instead. Vladimir, please, I can listen to reason. I can make my rule a partnership, a triumvirate if you wish." Malenkov was blubbling. "I could smell it in the air, this plot, this intrigue, this—I knew something was afoot. Something I didn't know what. All hands were turned against me, all—"

Tedor ran to the door, closed it, locked it.

"Vladimir, I beg of you—"

"Oh, shut up! I don't know any more about this than you do. You are Malenkov, I know that now. The other man looks like you but doesn't talk like you."

Tedor took Archevski's gun from his own pocket. "You try to fig-

ure it out," he said. He gave the gun to Dorlup, who stood watch over Russia's two top leaders.

Tedor ran to the drapes which hid the dressing alcove, tore them down, ripped them into strips. He bound Chenkov first, hand and foot.

"You realize you haven't a chance, whatever game you're playing," Chenkov said.

Tedor bound Malenkov, then fastened them together, sitting on the floor, back to back. If one of them struggled with his bonds he would strangle the other, for Tedor had tied their necks together.

"Give me the gun, Dorlup," he said, taking the pistol. "I haven't time. I can't play with you. I want you to answer one question and I'm going to give you ten seconds to start talking. If you don't, I'll kill you."

Chenkov squirmed, making Malenkov gasp and choke. Chenkov subsided. "What's your question?"

"I want to know the location of your storage areas for atomic weapons."

"N-never!" Malenkov gasped, his voice breaking.

Tedor started counting. "One, two, three, four, five—"

"Wait!" This was Chenkov. "There's no need making a martyr of yourself, Georgi. You tell me, what good would the information do them? They'll never

get a chance to use it."

"Y-yes. Don't move, Vladimir. You're choking me. I see what you mean. Very well, this is the information. We have three atomic storehouses, one in the Urals at—"

The information memorized, Tedor forced a gag of drapery material into Chenkov's mouth and one into Malenkov's. With Dorlup he left the study.

"But why did they give us the information so readily?" the solidio writer demanded.

"That's simple. Evidently, they've already removed their atomic weapons from the storage areas, possibly to airfields. They aren't familiar enough with time travel, though. We'll simply go back a dozen hours and blast those three locations. If Russia doesn't have atomic power for a sneak attack, she won't be able to attack at all. First stop is the Lubianka prison, however."

They found Lubianka Street after getting a vehicle from the Kremlin motor pool, the motor officer's eyes bulged when Malenkov and his personal body guard came down for the car themselves. They rushed inside the prison, where the warden demanded, stut-tering:

"Is—is this an inspection, Comrades? We are r-ready at any

t-time, of course, and honored, even, but sometimes, once in a while, you see—"

"Forget it," Tedor cut him short. "You have a woman prisoner, Anna Myinkov? Bring her to us, quickly."

"At once."

The warden was gone less than ten minutes, returning with a muscular, sexless female jailor who prodded Laniq ahead of her. Laniq stared at them dully, without hope.

"Thank you," said Tedor to the warden. "We'll take her."

Dorlup-Malenkov smiled and the warden bowed out. In the street, Laniq's spirit had returned. "Don't tell me Malenkov himself is going to be around for the execution?"

They didn't say anything. Tedor wanted to be in the car before they revealed themselves to her.

"You'll have to catch me first!" cried Laniq. Tedor had been holding her loosely by the arm and she suddenly tried to pull away. When his grip tightened, she turned on him furiously, raking his face with her nails, kicking, biting butting with her head.

Tedor pinned her arms to her sides while she cried in rage. "Cut it out, Laniq. I'm Tedor. Tedor!"

"Te-dor? Tedor? Oh, Tedor . . ." Laniq fainted in his arms.

They drove south with her to the time-conveyor.

THEY were twelve hours into the past, materializing abruptly on the field of the first atomic area.

Soldiers rushed the conveyor, but when the door opened and Malenkov stood revealed in the entrance, they saluted smartly. "Bring your commanding officer," said Dorlup, and when the man came—a full Marshal—Dorlup ordered three of the most powerful atomic bombs for the conveyor.

They were brought on flatcars, jerry-rigged to the conveyor's bottom at Tedor's direction, with a crude releasing device.

"This is—is somewhat irregular," said the Marshal.

Dorlup said nothing, looked at him scornfully.

"I am sorry, Comrade Premier."

"You should be."

They closed themselves within the conveyor, set the first of their atomic bombs for ten seconds, retreated thirty seconds into the past and took off.

In forty seconds they had climbed to thirty thousand feet. Intense light engulfed the conveyor as it sped away, followed almost at once by a shock wave which buffeted them helplessly about the cabin of the conveyor. Below them and

now far to their left, a great atomic mushroom billowed into the sky, then slowed, rising serenely on a brown and violet pillar.

"Let's hit the next one," said Tedor and they did so.

The third storage area was far out beyond the Ural Mountains and to the North, in the remote Siberian wilderness of the great Eurasian land-mass. They retreated back into time far enough to account for the two hours it took them to rocket from the Urals to Siberia, then circled over the storage areas while searchlights probed the sky for them like groping fingers.

"That way," Tedor explained, "all the plants will blow up simultaneously, with no chance for one to warn another."

They circled, and Dorlup said, "I'm bringing her down."

"Just a minute." It was Laniq, sitting near the telio. "Someone's calling." A face flashed into view on the screen—Ruscar.

"Let me speak to Barwan," he said. "You have a few seconds to decide whether you want to live or die."

"Take the conveyor back up," Tedor told Dorlup, and went to the telio. Ruscar looked far from happy.

"Tedor, you still have a chance. I've been following you in time,

ever since we found out what happened to Malenkov and Chenkov. You can't stop me now, Tedor. Everything is ready and there are enough atom and hydrogen bombs here at this one base to do the job."

Tedor was looking at Ruscar for the first time since his dual life had been revealed. Enemy of time tyrants on the one hand, tyrant who wanted all the world and all of time under his control on the other.

"Throw in with me, Tedor! I'll forget what you've done. We need men like you."

Tedor shook his head. "It would take me years to tell you what I think of you, so I won't even try. The answer is no."

"My conveyor is five miles to the south, Tedor. We're going to blow you out of the sky unless you—"

Tedor snapped the telio off, went to the controls and replaced Dorlup at them.

"Can he do it?" Laniq wanted to know.

Through the port, they watched the other conveyor streak into view. Suddenly there was a rattling noise and a furious hissing as Ruscar opened up with rockets and machine guns. Cursing, Tedor clutched at the controls and their conveyor plummeted towards the earth.

"We're not armed," Dorlup wail-

ed. "He can destroy us at his leisure."

"Maybe." Tedor brought them down to within a few hundred feet of the ground, Ruscar right behind them. The lack of anti-aircraft fire meant Ruscar had ordered the ground batteries out of action, since they might just as easily have hit him.

Ruscar's craft opened up again. A rocket ripped into the hull of their conveyor and exploded, flipping it in a quick 360 degree turn and flinging Tedor from the controls.

He climbed groggily to hands and knees, dragged himself back to the pilot chair. Laniq was stretched out on the floor, moaning. Dorlup sat dazed in a corner. But by the time Tedor sat at the instrument panel again, Laniq was on her feet groggily at his side.

"Bad?" She said.

"We're helpless, unless we can out-maneuver him."

They dived again. Tedor brought them out of it at the last moment, plunging them half a minute into the past. Ruscar had stayed with them all the way.

"All I need is time to release the bomb and get away, but he's sticking."

Machine gun bullets ripped in through their hull, unarmed

since the conveyor was not intended for aerial battle. Tedor forced the craft into a steep climb, then brought it down again in the same maneuver. But Ruscar fled into the past with him and he could not destroy the storage area and Ruscar's conveyor without also killing himself, Laniq and Dorlup in the process.

Ruscar was fast converting their conveyor into a sieve and Tedor realized it would be only moments before he damaged their engine and forced them to crash. They climbed once more, dove again. Laniq looked at Tedor, tears in her eyes. They had come so close to victory . . .

Tedor punched the controls rapidly. The conveyor rocked, absorbed another rocket hit, shuddered. Then for an instant, it was floating calmly in undisturbed air.

Tedor released the bomb and sent the ship skyward.

"What did you do?" Laniq cried.

"Ruscar figured I'd leap into the past again. I didn't. I tried the future, because it was our only chance. Just fifty seconds, but by the time Ruscar realizes his mistake, I hope . . ."

They looked down below them, saw a tiny dot which was Ruscar's ship materialize. Then it was blotted out, along with the stor-

age area, by a flash of light, a roar, a seething, rocking, thundering tempest—

Ruscar's conveyor, the storage area, the barren tundra below them—all were replaced by a huge, mushroom-topped pillar of kaleidoscoping destruction . . .

MUCH later, in southwestern United States:

"My father is going to be all right, Tedor. And have you seen the headlines?"

"Yes." He smiled at her. "There were three mysterious atomic explosions, almost simultaneous, in the USSR. Malenkov and Chenkov have become extremely conciliatory."

"The people of the world will never know what happened."

"Neither will Ruscar. He'd closed the year 1955, intending to move into it in the normal time-stream, sure it would be the crucial year. He died in 1954."

"Then, everything is fine—ex-

cept for all those trophies I have, Tedor. We could set up a museum, I suppose."

"What for? Those trophies are more valuable where they came from. I can't think of a better way to spend the first few weeks of our married life than to return them. Sort of a honeymoon in time." And Tedor took her in his arms.

She pulled away from him. "Just a minute, Tedor Barwan! I'm not going to kiss anyone until he removes that disguise."

Tedor smiled at her, turned to Dorlup. "You'd better do the same thing, Comrade Malenkov, unless you want the people around here to lynch you."

"I sure will," Dorlup said. "Wait till you see the solidio I'm going to write, though. We'll call it 1954. What a story!"

"Oh, no," groaned Tedor.

But Laniq kissed him and Tedor forgot everything else . . .

THE END

FEATURED NEXT MONTH:—

SECRET OF THE IMMORTALS

by

DANIEL F. GALOUBE

In Earth's far future, Berek's society controlled its population by making death mandatory after a man reached eight hundred years. It was now Berek's turn to die even though he still retained the appearance of youth. He rebelled, and the greatest man-hunt in history was on. Don't miss this novel of man's quest for immortality!

★ *Starlight, Starbright...* ★

THE inspiring injunction, "hitch your wagon to a star" has been taken over literally by the boys who build today's guided missiles! Radio control, heat-sensing ability, sonic-sensing—all these methods of controlling guided missiles suffer from the weakness that they may be interfered with by enemy countermeasures; to make sure that the war-headed missiles reach their destination, orders must be built into them.

To do this is simple—for short distances—an electronic brain can be pre-set for the guidance job. But when the distances over which the missile must go are long, some fixed, immutable point must be selected as a reference so that the missile's brain can correct its ac-

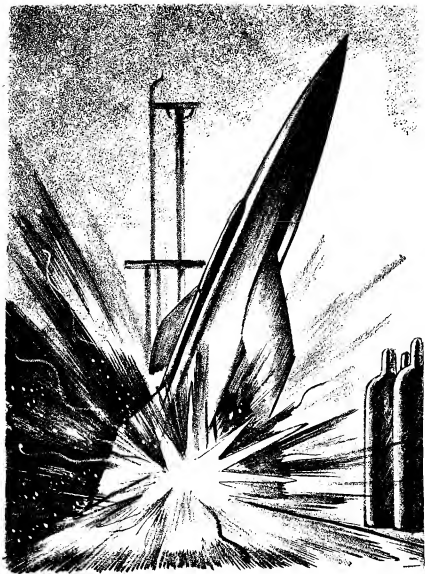
cumulated errors.

Guided missiles engineers have selected the stars as their reference points. Photo-electric eyes within the missile fix upon selected stars, and like a ship's captain navigating his vessel, these intricate electro-mechanical marvels set the course of the missile over land and sea, through daylight and darkness, unerringly and with super-human accuracy.

It is ironic to think that the stars which once guided men to new worlds, are now to lead brainless mechanisms, pregnant with destructive atomic energy to the helpless cities beneath them. "Twinkle, twinkle, little star—will you guide the rockets from on far . . . "



"We heartily recommend Professor Gibbs for that job you have in mind."



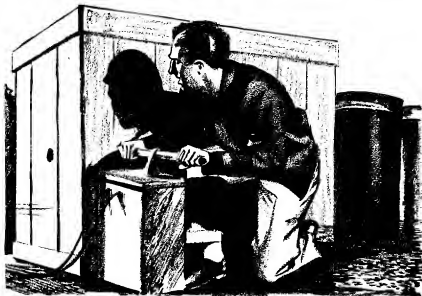
The Fifty-fourth Of July

By

Alan E. Nourse

Matt had to destroy the rocket because it was a symbol of evil that had brought economic disaster. But must he also destroy — the future?

IT was well after dark when Matt Matthews got back down to the headquarters camp, and saw the city stranger sitting there before the fire. He knew it was a city man after a single glance at the shiny, low-topped shoes and the reminiscence of a crease in the



dusty trousers. Matt tossed the gophers and the two small coyotes off his broad shoulders to old Moe Arhelger, across the campfire, staring in suspicious silence from the stranger to Moe and back again. "Who's he?" he asked finally.

"He wants to go down to the Ship," said Moe, tossing another stick into the fire. He was a thin, wiry old man, with a white rim of beard scraggling over his lean jaw. A short-bit pipe was clenched between a set of very bad teeth. On his head was a torn, filthy old felt hat, but his clear blue eyes held the silent confidence of authority. The old man puffed quietly as he glanced up at the young giant who had just arrived. "His name's Loevy — he says. Flew over from El Paso this morning in a 'copter, just to see me. Even knew my name—"

"Everybody in New Mexico knows your name," Matthews growled.

The old man nodded, his eyes bright. "Mr. Loevy wants to go down to the Ship tonight."

Matt stared at the stranger's half-day stubble. Then he burst out laughing. "That's what we all want to do, buddy. Just go down to the Ship. That's all. Only trouble is, the Bulldog isn't ready to lay out the welcome mat for us just yet." He glanced over at

Moe. "Did the doc say anything about Jack Abel?"

"Jack's dead. Three slugs in the head."

Matt's face darkened. He looked up at Loevy. "Jack wanted to go down to the ship, too. Tried to go down quiet-like." He set about skinning the first coyote, tossing the rest of the game to the group of silent men sitting around the fire near Moe. "You're wasting your time, stranger. Stick around a while. Be patient, like us. The Bulldog can't hold out forever."

Loevy ran a hand through his dark hair, watching Matthews with sharp brown eyes. "I wasn't figuring on going down quiet-like," he said.

Matt looked up as though seeing the man for the first time, his eyes dark with suspicion. "Then how *do* you plan to go?" His hand moved to the gun at his side, and he began massaging the stock with his huge paw.

Loevy glanced at the gun without fear. "Under a truce flag," he said.

Matthews spat. "Old man Gorcham has command of four hundred men down at the ship. They'll shoot anybody that comes close on sight." He looked up at Moe, caught the old man's blue eyes sharply. "I don't like this guy, Moe. I think we'd better take care of him."

Moe shook his head. "Take it easy, Matt. The man thinks maybe he can get this siege broken. Thinks Gorham may surrender if he knows what's happened — in Washington, all over the country."

Loevy nodded, bobbing his head eagerly. "I knew Gorham—before the crash. He's an old-guard soldier, he'll honor a truce flag." His voice was crisp in the still night air. "You want to get your hands on that ship—that's all you want, the whole crowd of you out here. Nothing else. So why risk a fight, risk getting killed, if I can get Gorham to surrender to you?"

Matt grinned unpleasantly. "Why do you think they call him the Bulldog? He'll never give up—until we starve him out. We've got the time, and the men, and the food. They can't last much longer—"

Loevy frowned in annoyance. "I say you may not need to wait."

MATTHEWS climbed to his feet and walked slowly over to the edge of the rocks where the camp was situated. It was on the edge of the desert, and down below sand and sage stretched for miles in the pale moonlight. On either side he could see the flicker of the other campfires, forming a huge circle, many miles in diameter. As he stood watching, his ear

unconsciously picked up the rustle of silent footsteps on the trail leading to the nearest campfire away—the guard-line which closed the circle tight. But he was not interested in the guard lines tonight. They were well guarded, no one could get through them. There were half a dozen dead soldiers lying out in the desert to attest to that, soldiers who had tried to break through to the main highway during the past three weeks. What held Matt's interest right now was the huge cyclone-fence enclosure in the center of the circle of fires. Inside the fence he could see the low, flat buildings of the Rocket Development Project, and in the moonlight he could make out the lines of the Ship itself, standing tall and lifeless in the darkness. He watched it for a moment, and his fists clenched.

He whirled back to the fire, lifting the city stranger up by the collar, dragging his face up close to his. "Why do you want to go down there?" he snarled.

Loevy's face was purple, and he gasped for breath. "Because there's no point in letting four hundred innocent men be slaughtered when you can have the Ship without firing a gun. That's why!"

"My but we're noble," Matt snapped. "What do you care how many are killed? Who sent you

here in the first place? Where did you get a 'copter to fly over here in?"

Loevy shook himself free, glaring up at the giant standing over him. "I stole a 'copter, if you have to know. And nobody sent me—"

"How did you know we were here?"

"Don't be a fool. The whole country knows you're here. Look, all I want is a chance to talk to Gorham under a truce flag for fifteen minutes. If I don't succeed, you don't lose a thing. What harm can it do?"

Moe Arhelger spat into the fire. "Can't do no harm. And it might just break this open for us, once and for all. Then we could go back home."

"But if he's a spy—he could have word from reinforcements. Maybe the Army's planning a march—"

Loevy snorted. "The Army isn't planning anything. The Army is starving to death. The nearest contingent is in San Diego, and they've got their hands full just scouring the countryside for food. They've got no fuel to come here with even if they felt like it—"

Matt scowled. "He could still be a spy."

Moe Arhelger nodded slowly, his eyes narrowing at the city man. Then he looked up at Matt. "I

know. That's why I want him to go down to the Ship. With you along with him."

THE trip down the mountain-side was slow. It was almost a half an hour before they reached the encampment at the bottom, on a gravel road that led straight out to the Rocket site. The road was piled high with rocks, and four men with old felt hats and plaid shirts sat in jeeps, watching the road for a stir of life.

Matt and Loevy commandeered a jeep, bounced down a gulley to by-pass the road block, and started along the road toward the fenced enclosure. A spotlight picked them up almost immediately, and Loevy hoisted a white shirt up on a pole, waving it to catch the light. Then slowly they drove ahead, until two more spotlights flashed on from the ship, scanning the sage on either side of them, flickering in their faces as they made their way along. Loevy sat tight-lipped, peering ahead into the darkness. Matthews drove silently. He had never been this close to Rocket Number Five before, but rockets were an old story to him. He had worked on Number Three and Number Four during his two years in the Labor Force. He knew quite enough about rockets.

More lights went on as they approached the fence. Inside, off to

the left and right were buildings, the storerooms and offices of the Project, and in the center, standing tall, with her lower third enshrouded in scaffolding and canvas, stood the ship—

Rocket Number Five. The last attempt, the straw that broke the camel's back. Four great ships before it, crashing into heaps of rubble, dragging the Earth down with them. And here the fifth, as yet unborn, never to be launched. Matthews made a bitter sound in his throat. When he thought of the horrible fifty-four days just past, he knew that his hate for this Rocket ship and everything it stood for was right. Moe was right, in his fanatical burning hatred of the old world which had struggled blindly to launch its ships, and starved itself to do so. But Moe wanted everything—the ships, the men, the government, everything. Matthews only wanted the ship.

He smiled grimly to himself. The garrison could not hold out much longer. They had no food, and the ring of guerillas surrounding the ship like a tight net would see that they got no food. It had been a long wait—but soon they would struggle out, begging for food and water, leaving the ship standing alone—

To be wrecked, and ripped, and torn into a thousand bitter pieces —

A soldier suddenly appeared in a spotlight inside the huge fence gate, rifle half-raised in his hands. He let out a shout and brought the rifle up to his shoulder. "Halt!"

The jeep's tires screeched. Then Loevy raised the flag again and waved it. "Truce," he called out. "We're unarmed."

"What do you want?"

"We want to talk to the Bulldog."

There was a long pause as a conference was held back in the shadows. Someone in the darkness ran out to join the gate guard. Then there was a grating sound as the lock on the gate snapped open. The gate swung out as five more soldiers encircled it from within, rifles cocked and ready. "Leave the jeep outside. Come in with your hands raised."

Slowly Matt and Loevy climbed out and walked forward. The soldiers looked weary, their clothes filthy, their eyes bright with hate. They watched the men as they walked in, and then closed around them, herding them across to a long, low building. Lights went on, and Matt could see the dim interior of a disused day room, the walls piled high with supply cartons.

"You wait," said one of the soldiers. "I'll see if the Colonel wants to see you." He watched them carefully until the gate

clanged shut. Then he nodded to another guard, and disappeared into the darkness.

THEY did not wait long. The door burst open, and a short, squat, grey-haired man strode into the room. Dressed in a T shirt and OD pants, he was not an imposing figure, but there was no mistaking the heavy shock of grey hair, the solid, sour set of the mouth, the wideset eyes. The Bulldog of White Sands, they had called him. The man in charge of administration of three Rocket Projects, the man who had sworn that space would never defeat him. He glared at Matthews for a moment, and then his glance shifted to Loevy, and his eyes widened.

"Well," he said sourly. "I hardly expected to see *you* joining up with these pigs."

Loevy's eyes flickered in a tired smile. "So you remember me," he said.

"I never forget a face." The Colonel stared at him with a stony expression for a moment. "White Sands, April of 1993—two and a half years ago, almost. Just after the third ship blew up. Name is—umm—Loevy—"

Loevy nodded. "That's right."

The Colonel's eyes hardened. "You were with a crowd that was trying to talk the government into junking the Rocket projects—

right?"

"That's right. We predicted the impending crash even then—

"Hogwash," said the Colonel. "A lot of statistical blather."

"Unfortunately, statistics is a scientific technique, and our predictions were not blather. We predicted the crash almost to the day. We said the 30th of July, 1995. We had no way of predicting the Iranian oil decision, which happened last April. That precipitated the crisis by a month, so it came on the first of July instead of the thirtieth. But socio-mathematics were far beyond the blather stage then. We hope we can still salvage something from the country now."

The old soldier blinked at him. "What do you want, Loevy?"

"I've come to ask you to surrender the Ship and march your men out of here."

Colonel Gorham snorted. "My orders were to guard and protect this rocket, down to the last man if necessary. On the sixth of July, a week after the crash, I had orders direct from the President to hold this Ship at any cost. He warned me then that there'd be mobs, maybe even an attempt to storm the enclosure." He scowled angrily. "They'll never get this ship as long as I'm alive."

"And have you heard from the President since the sixth?" Loevy's

voice was smooth.

"I have not."

"Perhaps that's because the President was hanged on the White House lawn the day after he called you. Quite a mob was there. The food pinch was just beginning to be felt. And that was forty-seven days ago—" He glanced up at the Colonel's white face. "Oh, I'm not lying to you. It happened. Have you had *any* communications recently?"

"How could I? They cut the telephone cables, and we can't get anything but hysterical nonsense from our radio sets—"

"**H**AS it occurred to you that many things may have happened in the course of this last month?" Loevy's voice was sharp in the still room.

"I'll hold this Ship until things get straightened out," the Colonel snapped.

"Colonel—*things aren't going to straighten out*. This isn't just a little depression we're in now, it isn't a small business recession that will just up and stabilize soon. This is an economic crash that has thrown the world back a thousand years. We may *never* recover from the crash that came on the first of July. The government is gone. Colonel. *There isn't any government*. The army has dissolved into the hills, hunting for food.

The only money with any value is being paid out by the hospitals for blood to restock their banks. And without money there isn't any food. The people in the cities are starving—standing in the streets starving because food isn't coming in. Communications are out, there isn't any commercial traffic—"

"I have a stockpile of emergency rations a mile high, and I have four hundred men who aren't running around in the hills," the Colonel snarled. "I have a job to do, and I'm doing it—"

"But you're guarding an empty shell! Look, the people don't know all the reasons for the collapse. They don't know the whole picture—but they know one thing. They know they've been taxed beyond endurance, their gasoline has been requisitioned, their boys taken for military and labor service, their money devaluated again and again so that the government could get a Rocket off the Earth before the Asians did. And they know that now the whole world has fallen in a heap, and they're starving to death. And they know that this Rocket was being worked on when the crash came. They want it, Colonel. They are going to get it, too. They need a scapegoat for these fifty-four days, and this Rocket is it! And there won't *be* any recovery as

long as the ship stands."

He stared at the Colonel, and then made a hopeless gesture. "You don't believe me, do you? You think that it's just a matter of time until things stabilize, and everything will be back to normal, don't you? Well, it won't Colonel. Do you know what they are calling the date, out there? The Fifty-Fourth of July! Fifty-four days since the crash, and things are getting worse every day. Even time has stood still; they've forgotten to use the calendar. There'll never be a world like you knew before. Colonel — but the agony and suffering and chaos must be paid for, somehow, and the Rocket is the price. Until the whole world knows that the Rocket is utterly destroyed, there will be no faith in government or people or anything else."

Loevy glanced nervously at Matthews, towering against the wall watching the discussion sourly. Then he looked back at the Colonel and leaned forward. "Let them take the ship. There are things here far more precious than any single rocket ship could ever be. You know what I mean. If you resist, they'll get the ship and *everything else*—"

The Colonel's eyes moved to Matthews' heavy face, and then back to Loevy. Suddenly his face looked very tired. "That's a

chance I'll have to take," he said wearily. "You're wasting your time, Loevy."

LATER, around the campfire, Matt stared gloomily at old Moe Arhelger. "I tell you, I don't like it," he said. "I just don't like it."

The old man cocked sharp eyes across the fire. "I don't see that any harm was done. We gave the Bulldog his last chance. He didn't care to take it. That suits me fine. Now he can watch out."

Matt shook his head sharply. "That isn't what I mean. I didn't like the looks of the place. It looked too much like a going concern. Gorham was too damned confident."

"Did you ever see a garrison commander who wasn't?"

"But Gorham is no fool. He knows we've got this encampment sewed up. He knows he can't get out and neither can his men. He knows there won't be any supplies coming in for him." Matt rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "And the look of the place—the look of the ship. I couldn't see much, of course, but it didn't look right—"

The old man's eyes narrowed. "What do you mean by that?"

Matt's forehead creased into a worried frown. "I don't know. I think they're trying to complete the Rocket for a flight."

"But that's crazy!" Moe exploded. "They don't have the supplies, they don't have the calculator power, they haven't got power for anything. We've seen to that. Gasoline generators for their spotlights—nothing else."

"I know, I know—it doesn't make sense." Matt shot a glance at Loevy, crouched at a nearby fire, and he lowered his voice. "And there was something Loevy said—about something more valuable than the ship itself—Look, Moe, we don't know how far the Ship had gone before the crash. Maybe all the calculations were completed."

Moe stared at the fire for a long moment. A tall, lanky man stumbled up the trail by flashlight, sending down a shower of pebbles. He stopped before the fire. "All quiet, Moe. They closed up shop after the delegation left."

Moe nodded to the man. "Tell Mike to alert his men, Tommy. Get everybody looking alive."

"What's up? Something about to break?"

The old man scowled. "I don't know. But I want everyone awake. Got it?"

The guard nodded, and vanished down the trail again. Moe turned to Matthews, a queer look in his eyes. "What do you think, Matt?"

"I think our time is running

out," said Matthews.

"Maybe you worry too much."

"Maybe."

Moe's eyes blazed. "They *can't* try to launch it," he snarled. "It's got to be smashed — smashed so hard they'll never dare try to make another one—" His hand clenched on his rifle until the knuckles were white.

Matt leaned forward eagerly. "Let me go down there, Moe. We've got dynamite. I could find a way to climb the fence, maybe, and start the works off. Once something went bang from the inside and broke their control of the place, we could mop them up."

Moe's hand relaxed. "You'd never make it alive."

"Somebody's got to try. There isn't much time, I'm sure of it—"

"All right. Try it. But before you go, you've got a visitor. I think you'd better talk to her."

THE girl was waiting in his tent, sitting alone in the darkness. She looked up into the flashlight beam, and there were wet streaks of dust on her cheeks. "Matt? Is that you?" She stumbled to her feet. "Oh, Matt—"

"Mary!" The big man stared at his wife, his eyes wide. "Mary, what are you doing *here*? How did you get here, why did you come?" He took her in his arms, held her tight as she pressed her

face against his chest, sobbing. Then suddenly he straightened up, held her out at arm's length, staring into her large brown eyes. "Mary—the farm—"

She closed her eyes, tears streaming down her cheeks, and shook her head miserably. "Gone. City people from San Diego—they came one night, they took it—"

A numbness ran down his spine as he stared at her. "But Dad and Johnny—"

"They never had a chance." She wiped her eyes with her sleeve, her voice faltering. "It was a crowd of men, maybe ten of them, came across the land about eight o'clock one night. They shot your Dad when he walked out on the porch. Shot him through the head. Then they came in the house and beat Johnny to death. Oh, Matt—it was horrible. They shot the cow and cooked her over an open fire. You should have seen them—they were starving, they were like wild men, calling us land-grabbers and food-hoarders. I sneaked out the back way when they weren't looking and ran down to the road to Escondido and found Harry Davis. He and a bunch of the boys had stolen some gas and were planning to drive over the mountains to join you here. They sent word around to the other farmers, and then they

brought me along—"

Matt stood numbly, staring at the girl's face. "Mary, you shouldn't have come here, you should have gone to the folks in town—they would have helped you, taken care of you—"

The girl whirled on him, her eyes pleading. "Oh, Matt, come away from here, come out of this horrible fight and come home! What does it matter if there's a Rocket out here — we can't eat Rockets, we need food. The City folks are coming out in hordes. There was a man said the water supply wasn't going to last to the north, that the cars were lined up three deep from the coast clear out to Salt-Lake, bumper to bumper, a week ago. They stole gasoline from the refineries, before they blew them up. They're all heading east and north—oh, Matt, take me home—"

He stood there in the dim light of the flashlight, and then knelt down beside her, holding her against him. "I can't, Mary. Not yet," he said softly. "The world we knew before was crazy. This Rocket was crazy — this being afraid of war, and fighting to outdo the rest of the world was crazy, somehow—"

She stared at him. "But everybody knew that if we didn't get there first, the others would. And there would have been a horrible

war, the end of everything—”

“Everyone was so busy being afraid of the war that they couldn’t see what was happening to the world around them. They didn’t see that something worse than a war could happen until it was too late. They figured the oil would last another hundred years, and it only lasted twenty. They thought they could go on like this forever—” He stared blankly out at the darkness, his eyes hollow. “It was that Rocket that did it. That’s why we have to destroy it.”

“Matt, if we don’t go now we won’t have any home left to go to. Those people don’t know how to farm, they’ll kill all the animals, and strip the trees and fields, and burn all the buildings—”

He shook his head, hardly able to put into words the bitterness in his heart. “It won’t do any good to go back, without destroying the Rocket. It’s the last remnant of the old world—standing out there—the world that led us to *this*. It’s poisonous, it’s evil. There’ll never be recovery unless the ship is wiped out.” He looked down into her frightened eyes, rubbed her shoulders gently. “Don’t be afraid. It won’t be long. I’m going out there tonight. I’m going to blow that Rocket into a million pieces.”

She clung to him like a child, shaking her head helplessly. “You will be killed, I know you will be

killed, *please*, Matt— Oh, if anything happens to you, I—I won’t know what to do, I can’t let you go—”

“I’ve got to, Mary.”

Her voice was very small. “And when it’s over—?”

“We’ll manage somehow. I don’t know how. It doesn’t really matter now. I don’t know what kind of a world we’ll have when it’s all over, but I know that I’m going out to get that Ship. If it’s the only thing I ever do that’s right.”

HE went out alone. He tried to force out of his mind the account Mary had brought of the butchery back home, concentrating on one thing, and one thing only. The Ship had to be destroyed. Standing out there in the desert, it was the symbol of all that was wrong with a world that had somehow, abruptly, been left behind. Matt saw it in black and white, bitterly, a cause and effect relationship. He could neither rationalize it or deny it. But somehow, he felt, by destroying the Ship he could wipe out a past too horrible even to think about. He knew he had to do it.

Matthews moved quietly through the blackness. The sandy soil was caked and hard under his feet, and the moon had just gone under the horizon to the West. Far ahead he could see the feeble guard

lights of the enclosure, and he stopped, panting, staring at the tiny figures pacing back and forth. He had grown used to moving cautiously through the desertland without making a sound; now he concentrated on silence for his very life, and the only sound in his ears was the jogging of the dynamite pack on his shoulders.

He circled slowly, making for the section of the fencing closest to the ship. He knew there would be few lights, since precious gasoline had to run generators to provide any at all. He had examined the gates as they had opened earlier in the evening, and felt certain there was no break-circuit alarm on the fence. Power, again. Only for the barest, most critical essentials. And with four hundred men available, eyesight was the best way to guard the fence—

The heavy metal wire appeared suddenly in the gloom, and he fell flat on his face in a little gulley as the tread of a guard's feet sounded from a distance. A small flash-light flicked on and off as the footsteps approached. Matt hugged the ground, holding his breath as the soldier moved silently by. Then he was up against the fence, dragging the climbers from his pockets, strapping them onto his boots. Cutting the heavy fencing wire was out of the question—the sound would ring out in the

stillness like a pistol shot. But the barbed wire at the top could be cut with only a small sound. He struggled up the bare fence, a few inches at a time.

It seemed like hours. He knew the guard's timing down to the second, and he worked himself up, panting. It was the dog-watch; the men would not be too alert, even men fighting for their lives—

He clung to the fence with one hand, and snapped the four barbed strands with a hand tool, felt them curl away with a *ping*. He dragged his body up and caught his knee on the top of the fence. In an instant he had dropped to the ground inside the enclosure—

On his feet, he crouched and ran for the tall, dark ship. The intervening buildings provided him cover. Down one of the concrete streets a dozen men were huddled around a small fire near the gate, talking and laughing. Matt slipped across the street, and saw the ship's mammoth scaffolding rise up in the darkness.

It was a beautiful ship, tall and silvery, enshrouded like a statue waiting to be unveiled. He glanced about the grounds around, and his eyes widened. Great tanks of fuel stood nearby, recently-opened cartons of supplies were everywhere in evidence. A huge pile of oxygen cylinders formed a heavy pyramid.

Matthews walked over to one of the open crates, peered into it. Heavy material, plastic, metal—

Space suits.

HE opened the pack on his back, drew out the bundles of dynamite carefully, separated them from the coil of wire to the small detonator. Somewhere in the distance he heard talking, and he hurried his movements. Finally the deadly bundles were free.

As he stooped to duck under the first tier of the scaffolding a bright light flashed on above him, and an alarm bell started clanging. He cursed, and ran like a cat under the scaffolding, up to the great silvery fin of the ship. Of course, he should have thought that if there was no circuit alarm on the fence there surely would be one around the ship. Far away a roar of voices rose up, and shouts, the pummel of running feet. Frantically he thrust a dynamite charge under one of the fins of the ship, then ran to a second and laid another charge. A rifle cracked somewhere, and another, and he darted into the piles of boxes, unreeling the detonator wire as he ran. There were hoarse shouts all about him now. He ducked into a huge empty crate, not fifty feet from the charges. Huddling down in it for protection, he connected wires to the battery, and slammed

down the plunger—

The shock wave hit him before the sound did, picking up the crate like a pill-box hurling Matthews head over heels. The roar burst in his ears, striking him like a palpable wall, and a shout of despair went up among the soldiers. Matt stood up, then, staring up at the great metal hulk. There was a heavy rushing sound and the ship faltered, shaking like a giant aspen leaf, and slowly began to tip—

It struck the ground with a deafening crash, a grating of torn metal and the screech of broken, twisted planks. Something exploded into a pillar of fire—and then, in the distance Matthews saw flashes of fire from the desert, heard rifles cracking. A soldier, running to the fence, saw him and raised his rifle, wild eyes reflecting the fire. Matthews dove for him, threw him back with a grunt as the rifle cracked into the air. And then the compound was wild with the sound of running, shouting men.

Matthews ran for a huge truck standing near the fallen ship. He threw himself up into the cab, gunning the motor to a roar. Then the gears grated and the truck started forward, straight for the crowd of soldiers lining up at the fence. Matt gripped the steering wheel, leaning as low as possible, throwing the huge truck at the

fence with all its power. The impact nearly threw him through the windshield; he heard a grating as the wire bunged out and the fence-posts snapped. Shifting into compound low, he drove the truck through the fence like a bulldozer.

And then, all around him, the men from outside were pouring through the break, screaming in triumph, rifles cracking. A horde of them came, and the soldiers fell back, bewildered, shooting wildly, running in circles of panic as the angry mob poured through. And then Matt felt the first wave of shock pass through him. Wearily he dropped his head against the dash-board, gasping for breath. He knew that the ship was taken.

HE did not know how long he was unconscious. Fires were burning in a dozen buildings around him, and he could hear the screams and shouts of the raiders. Dark figures rushed wildly by, silhouetted against the orange flames. Matt crawled down from the truck as four men ran by with crowbars, shouting at the top of their lungs. Matt stared at the crowd surrounding the fallen ship, shouting, raising torches high in the dark night—

He watched for a long moment, but something flickered in his mind. It was a picture of mad, frantic destruction on all sides

of him, but something was whispering softly in his ear. Loevy's words. Loevy's intense face. *There is something far more precious than any one Rocket ship here—*

Staring at the screaming mob, Matthews suddenly knew what Loevy had meant. A wrecking crew was at work on the ship, savagely venting their pent-up rage and fear and frustration on the inanimate metal, wrenching hull plates off with violent screeches, ripping and slicing stanchions with blow-torches hissing. A dozen people were screaming in and out of the air-lock, dragging couches, springs, chunks of instrument panel, hoards of supplies, oxygen tanks. The crowd was exultant, the fire-light shining on a thousand wild faces, maddened by the lust of destruction. But Matthews stared, and the feeling of sickness and revulsion grew hard in the pit of his stomach.

He turned and started over toward the buildings. The deed was done, but horror was still at large in the world. He didn't know what the future held—and yet, somehow now he didn't want to join the insane fury at work ripping the Rocket to shreds. Loevy's words nagged at his mind, and he made his way between the burning buildings, feeling the desert breeze turned hot in his face, until he saw the concrete and stone ad-

ministration building up ahead.

We hope maybe we can still salvage something . . .

As Matt walked through the doorway of the headquarters office he stopped short, stiffening to the sound of a forty-five booming in the room before him.

There was Moe, his back half to the door, holding the still smoking automatic in his hand.

And Matt's eyes went from Moe to a long row of filing cabinets against the far wall. Beside a partially open drawer a figure slumped against the side of the cabinet, hands clutching at a sheaf of papers inside the drawer. It was the Bulldog, the colonel himself. But even as Matt stared wide-eyed, the colonel let out a rasping sigh and fell to the floor.

He lay still beside another body—that of Loevy.

"Moe!"

Moe turned as Matt strode into the room. There was an angry look on the old man's face.

"A spy, that's what he was—you were right, Matt. I caught him in here with the Bulldog. They were talking and going through the files together—looked like they were planning on skipping out. Fat chance!" Moe laughed mirthlessly. "Whatever they were looking for they won't use now. And nobody else will. Got a match, Matt? I'm going to burn this

place to the ground!"

Matt stared from the dead bodies to Moe and over to the cabinet with the drawer still half open. He saw the sheaf of papers the Bulldog had been holding just before he died. He remembered again what Loevy had said — *there is something far more precious than any one Rocket ship here—*

"Moe — you're missing out on the fun at the Ship!" Matt said suddenly, intensely.

"I'll get out there. But first I got to—"

"Let me do it, Moe. —I'd enjoy seeing them two burn together. Afterall, it isn't much of a favor to ask . . ."

Moe looked at him curiously for a moment, then shrugged. "Why not? If it wasn't for you we wouldn't be in here at all tonight. Go ahead. I'll meet you at the Ship. Make a nice big fire!"

AND then Moe was gone and Matt stood alone in the room. He stood and stared down at the dead bodies; Loevy's face showing fear and frustration just as it must have when Moe's bullet found his heart; the Colonel, slumped partially across Loevy's body, the Bulldog face in a tight angry knot, even in death. The colonel had been a brave man, a tough one. Matt wished suddenly that he had not had to die.

He crossed hurriedly to the file and pulled the sheaf of papers from the drawer. A sheaf of blue papers—blue papers with white lines . . .

Blue-prints!

That was what Loevy had meant. The calculations had been completed, the blue-prints made. The ship had been almost completed, and now it was destroyed—

But the blue-prints remained—

Here were the hopes and dreams of centuries. Here were the plans, the specifications, the construction plans. Fifty years of the Earth's resources, and now the project they had planned and specified was being destroyed in a single night, the night of the fifty-fourth of July—

He stared at the prints, his whole body trembling. He hated the Rocket, he hated everything it had ever stood for in the old world before the crash. It had stripped him of his home, robbed him of his future. It had robbed the whole world of its heritage, and he hated it.

And yet, to go to the planets had always been man's great dream. The ship could be destroyed without utterly destroying the dream. Because someday, somehow, men could take these precious papers, sometime when the world was sane again, and

build another ship—

His mind rushed back to his boyhood days, and he remembered sharply the lure of the open spaces he had felt then. Someday, he had dreamed, he would build a rocket to the Moon, and go out there to explore and discover. It hadn't mattered what he would explore, what he would discover. All that had mattered was the urge to go. An urge he had shared with thousands of men—

He hadn't known then that the goal would crush the world into a smoking ruin far worse than any war. A crash that brought slow death by starvation, a crash that wrenched the livelihood from the mouths of millions, a crash that demoralized them and drove them back to the caves to work and fight like savages for a few morsels of bread. He hadn't known that—because it wasn't really necessary that it happen. Men could, someday, find a way to go out without bankrupting the world to do it—

He searched frantically, found a huge pasteboard box. He had seen others moving through the torchlight with boxes filled full of loot. He began loading the blue-prints into it, breathlessly, glancing over his shoulder for fear someone might come in. He reached into his pocket, drew out his revolver and placed it on the cabinet

beside him as he worked. Let them burn the buildings and tear up the Ship—but they must not destroy these papers. Let the Rocket Project be dead, utterly dead, torn to shreds by the people of this strange twilight world, but *the dream need not die*—

HE heard a sound behind him, and he whirled, staring up into Moe Arhelger's bearded face. The old man stood there, a strange light in his wild eyes, staring first at Matt, then at the blue papers in the box. "I see now why you wanted to be alone!" He looked up at Matt, a long, slow, savage look. "Dump it, Matt," he said, motioning to the box.

Matthews' arm tightened around the carton. "I want these," he said softly. "You've got your Rocket, Moe. They'll never build another one—"

"*I said dump it.*" There was a harsh edge to the old man's voice. "We're cleaning the place out. Everything. There'll never be another one, never, as long as the world lives."

"But what do you care about these?" Matt cried. "You'll be dead long before they ever try Rockets again."

"They're evil!" the old man snarled. "Everything about them is evil. They've dragged us down into the dirt, down so far we'll

never be able to crawl up again—" His rifle levelled, slowly. "Throw those prints on the floor, Matt. Touch a match to them, right here. Or I'll burn them for you."

Slowly Matt turned, lifted up the box. It was heavy; his eyes flicked to the old man, and he rested the box gently on the bench for a moment. And then he threw it in the old man's face, and snatched up the revolver from the bench. He fired four times, and the old man doubled over and pitched forward on his face, groaning. Matt kicked the rifle across the room, throwing the blue prints back into the box. Panting, he shot out the light, and fled across the compound toward the opened gate.

Somewhere out there Mary would be waiting. And maybe Loevy's group was still alive, somewhere, maybe they still knew a way toward recovery now that the Rocket was destroyed. The fifty-four days of chaos might be over now. They would know what to do with the precious box. It would be in safe hands until men were ready to build again.

Matt ran through the gate and into the shadows outside the compound. In the flickering light of the flames behind him he could make out a figure approaching.

"Matt! Oh, Matt — you're safe!"

It was Mary, and he felt a gladness sweep through him. She grabbed his arms then, her eyes tear-filled with relief. She glanced down at the box he held closely against him. "Matt, what's that?"

He motioned her toward the

deeper shadows and a jeep he saw standing unguarded. His voice was grim as he answered her. "It's for the future, Mary . . . the future."

Moments later they drove away into the night.

INTRODUCING the AUTHOR

★ *Alan E. Nourse* ★

(Concluded from Page 2)

by is fine under any circumstances, especially when one runs a 14 hour day of ward rounds, lectures and thick textbooks that leaves one limpish late in the evening. But to have a hobby that pays tuitions is beyond compare. I got started reading science fiction about the time I was seriously thinking of a medical career; I started writing science fiction about the time I was applying for medical school admission, and the result has been an interlocking schizophrenia. The right hand wouldn't know the left if they met on the street. We ignore each other and go our merry ways, but we're both married to the same wife—

I think this is getting confusing—but it isn't at all, in reality. Medicine is deeply absorbing and exciting; writing is also absorbing, and exciting in an entirely different way. It has its incomparable highs—the first check for the first story you ever sold, a thrill that

comes literally once in a lifetime; it has its abysmal lows—the priceless novelette that meets with a single-minded barrage of editorial sneers; it has its modest bonanzas—the Junior Literary Guild selection of your first book, which takes you out of the woods for the rest of your education. It is also, I suspect, something which you never, never, quit doing.

A word about JOURNEY FOR THE BRAVE, if I may. It's one of the first science fiction stories I ever thought of, and one of the last that I've written. It's not in any sense autobiographical, and if it ever does happen, nobody in the wide world will ever know it—except for one man, and he won't tell. But happen this way or not, one day soon a man is going to be sitting in a cockpit waiting for a count-down, and there will be many things in his mind—

I hope you like the story.

—Alan E. Nourse

★ Invincible Submarine ★

AT one stroke, the far-sighted, visionary men who planned our atomic subs, have made obsolete all other kinds. Speeds, range and deadliness of the atomic sub are incomparably greater. What is probably more important, the atomic sub is a perfect anti-submarine weapon!

With its quiet engines, its tremendous speed, and its arsenal of detecting and killing devices, it can literally sweep the surface and the depths of the ocean. As an airplane depends upon radar so a

sub uses supersonic instruments.

Crewmen sit before screens similar to radar types. They can spot anything that moves, pinpoint it, and then blast it with sonic directed torpedoes.

A little-known surprise of the sub designers, is a rocket equipped speed boosting device, whose purpose is to permit the atomic sub to make incredibly fast evasive maneuvers—almost like an underwater rocket! It seems that the “pigboats” are becoming invincible—with atomics!



"Have a food capsule?"

DISPOSAL UNIT

By

Daniel F. Galouye

Instatran units offered teleportation as the modern way to travel. Naturally the Company did a big business — one that had to be stopped!

THE roar of the stratorocket's main tubes was a muffled thunder as Kent Murray went nervously down the aisle to the last seat in the rear.

With an abrupt shake of his head, he refused the accelopill which the hostess offered. He slumped in his seat and closed his eyes in dismay.

He had never imagined he would be a murderer. But soon now he would have to kill . . .

"Never use them myself," said the large man who squeezed past the hostess and into the seat next to Kent. "Rather like to feel inertia forcing me back against the pads like the hand of a giant." He laughed jovially. "I find flight without the pills quite exhilarating, don't you?"

Kent nodded numbly, glancing disinterestedly at the man. Heavy

brow; large, knotty hands; a hint of determination in his eyes. A garrulous businessman.

"Name's Thomas J. Warren," the passenger offered as the stratorocket was towed to the launching ramp. "Of the brokerage firm of the same name," he added belatedly.

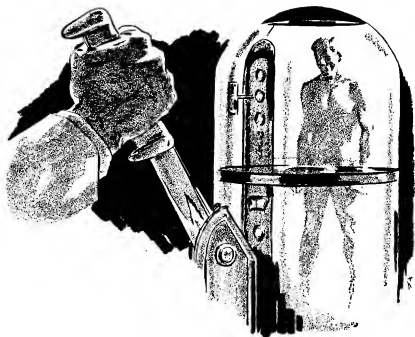
Kent said nothing.

"What's your line?" the man persisted.

"Government service," Kent answered listlessly. "Kent Murray."

He bit his lips, realizing that this Warren might be produced later to disclose that a Kent Murray had ridden a stratorocket from Los Angeles to Washington only hours before the murder.

But he relaxed, remembering that his plan also included admitting the murder in his investigative report. He wouldn't call it a



murder, though. He would list it as a tactful disposal of . . . something that wasn't human.

There would be no penalty. For the crime would have no precedent. How could you be guilty of killing someone who had never been born?

Abruptly, the launching surge stripped away his awareness.

WHEN consciousness returned he resisted weightlessness and drew his flailing arms back in, folding them against his chest. The brush of thin air against the skin

of the otherwise quiet craft was but a forlorn sibilant.

"Great!" exuberated Warren, tightening the belt that held him in the seat. "Wonderful feeling! I don't even black out any more."

Then he stared sympathetically at Kent. "But I see you do. Guess you've been off the accelopills for only a few trips. But a couple more hops and you'll be all right."

Kent made it obvious that he was ignoring the man. But, as the other passengers began recovering from the effects of the pills, War-

ren continued talking.

"It's like fighting a giant and finding that you're stronger than he is. And, when the battle is over, this is your reward . . ."

He let his arms float out in front of him, wavering like buoyant seaweed in almost calm water.

Kent nodded absently. If he was lucky, he could snare his intended victim within the hour. But how would he kill him? With his hands? A gun?

"Yes, sir," Warren smiled broadly in gratification. "It's strato-travel for me any time I have to hop from one city to another. But I'm afraid this rocket stuff is a little slow for interplanetary—now that they have Instatrans. Have to get over to Marstown the latter part of this year. Think I'll give the new system a try."

Kent stiffened.

"They say the experience is terrific," Warren went on. "Makes you feel like a new person. Imagine erasing a two months' rocket trip with a fast-as-light leap simply by entering one stall and stepping out of another millions of miles away! Yes, sir, I'm going to give Instatrans a try."

"Good God!" Kent turned frantically to him. "Don't do it!"

Warren frowned perplexedly. "And why not?"

Kent faced forward again. This man, after all, wouldn't step into

an Instatrans stall for months yet. He was in no immediate danger. But there were scores of unsuspecting businessmen and government officials using them every day—on interplanetary trips and for city-to-city transit.

"I say, why shouldn't I try Instatrans?"

And no one would know the unimaginably brutal scheme that was involved in each transmission. He would expose it all in his report, of course. But he wouldn't make the report until . . . he killed a man first.

"I realize," Warren continued, "that the owners of Instatrans aren't what might be called respectable businessmen. But what the hell? They're delivering the goods. It might be at an exorbitant price. But the time saved is well worth the fee when you can come out ahead on a big business deal."

The hostess came around again with the accelopills. Kent and his neighbor refused.

Moments later, servo-units swung the craft around and radar-controlled rockets came to life in a slow buildup of throbbing power which would reach full force within minutes. Kent relaxed in the grip of gently increasing deceleration; he closed his eyes, and tried to direct his attention to planning the murder.

But, as the force pressed him

against the seat with mounting intensity, he felt strong arms lift him from the chair. Fighting the growing inertia, he opened his eyes.

Warren, grimacing to overcome the effects of deceleration, was struggling with him toward the escape dock at the rear of their seats!

Warren was no loquacious broker! He was a killer! He was one of them! And they were intent on slaying him before he could reach his own victim!

In a desperate reflex, he rammed his knees into Warren's chest. The businessman was jolted backward both by the kick and the grip of deceleration. His head cracked against the bulkhead and he slid down to the floor, lying still. Blood oozed into the hair at the back of his scalp.

The ship surged as the tubes spat again. Kent rolled across the floor and into the steel plate next to Warren. He tried to struggle up. But inertia pinned him there helplessly. Then he lost consciousness.

When Kent recovered minutes later the rocket was resting in its dock at the Washington terminal. Warren was still breathing, but he remained unconscious behind the last seat.

Kent shook the dizziness from his head, rearranged his clothing

and joined the others in the rush for the forward hatch.

DARKNESS had already descended on Washington when he paid the driver at an intersection in the suburb and strode hesitatingly down the tree-lined street.

Nervously, he glanced around. But no one was in sight.

At the center of the block he turned up the walk leading to a single brick house flanked by lines of oval cedars. But he did not go up the steps. Instead, he strode swiftly across the lawn and disappeared behind the first cedar that half-hid the large living room window.

Cautiously, he looked in.

The victim was not in the room. But he was home. For his briefcase and hat lay in their customary place on the mantel. He must have been in for hours, having made his report immediately on arriving in Washington.

Maud—his own Maud—sat in the huge chair close to the artificial fire. She held the knitting needles daintily but the small, wool sock took shape rapidly below her swiftly moving hands.

Peter (he was going to be six next month) and Sue, two years younger, reclined on the rug at her feet, looking at large, gaudily colored picture books.

Kent turned from the scene and

closed his hands in desperation over his face. *His* wife! *His* children! Yet, they might never be his again if he didn't execute the plan faultlessly. They may forever belong to another man.

Sickeningly, he wondered why he hadn't accepted Mars duty when it had been offered to him only a month before. He and Maud had always wanted it. But, like an idiot, he had turned it down because he thought the Instatrans investigation would be interesting.

And, as an end result of that refusal, now he was forced to commit murder.

He touched the weapon in his pocket, fingered its bulky silencer. And from the feel of the cold steel he drew the courage that seemed to seep elusively from him on remembering that he must slay the—imposter.

Then the breath caught in his throat as he stared back through the window.

The victim had entered!

Knowing just what the man would do was an uncomfortable sensation. But it was only natural that the other would follow the pattern of habit as unyieldingly as he himself had.

The man brushed his cheek lightly against Maud's, demonstrating the fact that he had just shaved (Kent always shaved in the evening.) Then he kissed her on the

lips.

Impulsively, Kent swore below his breath and his hand closed around the weapon. But he forcibly relaxed his tense muscles. He could not kill in a rage. He must do it calmly, methodically. Maud must never know.

He studied the man in the room, appalled at the uncanny resemblance that existed between himself and the other. They were dressed identically. Their features, physical proportions, mannerisms were exactly alike. He, Kent Murray the first, differed from the other, Kent Murray the second, only in that he wore a hat, whereas the man in the room was bareheaded.

The victim sat in a chair opposite Maud, and Sue went over and climbed on his knee. He held her hands and laughed as he juggled her up and down on his leg.

He *wasn't* human! He *wasn't* human! Kent repeated it to himself bitterly over and over again. It would be no crime. He could kill without any remorse. And he could convince even the Chief of the Investigative Bureau that he had not murdered. He could not be responsible for killing something that had no birthright, that had not existed twelve hours ago.

Sue returned to the rug and Maud went over and sat on the arm of the chair. Her hand slid

around his shoulder and playfully she traced the contours of his face with a caressing finger.

Don't, Maud! he wanted to shout. *Don't! He isn't real!*

KENT calmed himself and backed away from the window. He had to remain composed. Leaning against the house, he went over his plan in the darkness.

He would tease Butch in the yard, make him bark lustily. And the man in the house would come out to investigate. Kent remembered that he himself invariably went out to see what was wrong every time the big dog barked at night.

Then, with one silent shot the murder would be over.

He would put the body in the car and go inside to tell Maud that Butch had killed another stray cat and that he had to take it out in the car and dump it.

Kent felt the stubbles on his face . . . He would not be able to linger long in the room. She might notice he needed a shave only minutes after he had demonstrated that he was clean-shaven.

A last look in the window . . . Maud bent over and kissed the man on the cheek while her hand played in his hair.

Anger-filled, he turned away, his face rigid in grim resolution.

He stepped from behind the ce-

dar and turned toward the back of the house.

But a hard, round object rammed against his back. A hand clamped on his shoulder from behind.

"Keep your mouth shut!"

Kent stiffened. He had been a fool. He should have killed the one on the stratorocket. Then they might not have known he had come to Washington.

A second man stepped from behind another cedar and stood in front of him. It was the one who called himself Warren.

"You got a car?" he whispered, motioning down the driveway.

Kent nodded, his hand creeping toward the weapon in his pocket.

But Warren, detecting the motion, seized his wrist and took the gun from him. Then, patting Kent's clothes, he located the keys to the automobile, jerked them savagely from his pocket. The bulky gold charm caught in the material and ripped a shred from his trousers.

"Make sure he doesn't have any more guns," the man at Kent's back suggested. "Headquarters wouldn't like it if we bungled again this time."

"He's clean," Warren assured, starting down the driveway.

"How long does your outfit think it can get away with this Instatrans fraud?" Kent asked acidly.

Warren laughed. "We'll get along all right."

"I'm only the first to escape from a transmitter stall." Kent stopped as the man with the gun unlatched the double gates and swung them wide. "There'll be more to get away from the disposal unit. And some of them—"

"You're not the first," Warren interrupted, motioning him along toward the car that was parked in front of the garage. "There was another. Both of you proved us right—that anyone who escaped would try to kill his number two first. But Headquarters will fix it so there won't be any more escapes."

"Yeah," said the man with the gun. "When we found out it was a government man that escaped this time the Main office started the skulls rolling. The stalls are gonna be air-tight from here on out."

They reached the car and Warren opened the door.

A low growl sounded from around the side of the garage.

The armed man spun around. "That your dog? Quiet him!"

"Okay, Butch," Kent whispered, trying to hide the eagerness he injected into the order.

To Butch, the command was the equivalent of "sic 'im." The growl welled furiously as the massive animal sprang from the shad-

ows.

The gun gruffed through its silencer. In the same instant Kent whirled on Warren and drove a fist into his face; he lunged around the garage even before the big man reeled back into the shrubbery.

The weapon coughed again and Butch's growl ended in a yelp as Kent leaped the fence and raced across the yard in the rear.

He sprinted around the neighbor's house, darted across the street and went through two more yards. At the second street he turned and ran silently to the cab stand in the next block.

A HALF-HOUR later he entered a drugstore videophone booth in the nearby commercial section, dropping hopelessly on the seat before the scanner-screen.

The call-letters of his liaison agent formed in his mind. But, even with his finger on the perforated disc, he hesitated before dialing.

Should he report in now and give the signal that would send other agents swooping down on all Instratrans receiving and transmitting stalls?

If he did, he would have to relinquish his plan of killing the other Kent Murray. For, as soon as they found out that there were two of them, he would never get their consent to dispose of the sec-

ond one—the imposter.

But, how could he get close enough to the other Kent to slay him? It was apparent now that, to the Instatran men, Kent Murray the second, who was totally unaware of the existence of an identical personality, was but a trap—a baited snare to lure the original Kent Murray to his assassination.

He dismissed the official call-letters from his mind and slumped in the seat.

Suddenly his face flashed with encouragement. There *was* another way! He had only to lure the other from the house in such a manner that he would not be followed by Instatran killers!

There was only the matter of possible voice recognition that might prove a snag. But then he remembered it wasn't often that an individual could identify his own voice through an electrical amplification system.

Enheartened, he switched off the video-transmit circuit in the booth and dialed the number of his home. The screen lit up and Murray the second's face took shape.

"Murray," said the other. "Who is it? I'm not getting any picture."

"This is Froman at headquarters. Video circuit's out." He pronounced the numerals and letters

comprising Kent Murray's official designation, as headquarters always did on contacting agents.

"Jackson's handling liaison for me," the other said irritably.

"I know." He tried to imitate Froman's voice. "Jackson's tied up with another matter. And something's come up on the Instatrans case. He turned the file over to me."

"Oh." The other had apparently been taken in by the ruse.

"I've just read your report on the Instatrans hop from L. A. to Washington this morning." He was taking a chance that the report *had* been submitted.

"Yes?"

"And we considered the case closed until one of Instatran's men contacted us fifteen minutes ago."

The other Kent Murray scratched his chin pensively, waited.

"Guy's name is Thomas J. Warren. He's ready to tell us everything that's illegal about Instatran's transmission method. He's registered in the Starkton hotel under that name and will wait in his room until one of our men contacts him . . . Get there and find out what's on his mind."

"Does it figure in with the sounds I heard in my back yard and finding my dog with a slug in his head?"

KENT hesitated. How should he answer that one? Was

headquarters supposed to know about the incident in the yard?

He took a chance. "First I've heard about it. What happened?"

"I just reported it in to Jackson half an hour ago. He—"

"If you did, it hasn't been entered in the file. Jackson didn't say anything about it. But I wouldn't be surprised. Warren said you were probably being watched to prevent his reaching you. That's why he holed up in the hotel. Better use evasive tactics on your way over to the Starkton."

The sudden development in the conversation had been a break. Kent had been groping for some means of getting the other to the hotel without being followed.

The face on the screen stared thoughtfully ahead for a moment. Then, "Okay, I'll get right on it . . . Thomas J. Warren, Starkton hotel."

He twisted his head around. "Maud. Got to go out on a job."

"Will you be long, dear?" the familiar voice sounded weakly from the background.

"Not more than a couple of hours." The other's hand reached forward to the switch below his screen.

The figure dimmed and the screen went blank as the sibilation in the speaker died out.

Kent was rigid in contemplation for a moment. Had the ruse suc-

ceeded? Would he be suspicious? He tried to imagine himself in the other's position. It wasn't hard to do; for, after all, weren't they the same person — up until twelve hours ago?

Maybe Kent Murray the second would report in for verification of the orders. Most probably, though, he would not. For such procedure as switching liaison men wasn't unusual. But it made no difference. For, even if he should call headquarters and discover the subterfuge, they would authorize his compliance with the mysterious instructions. They would follow through as a means of determining the purpose behind the call, especially since it was in relation to the Instatrans case.

And Kent would need only one shot at the victim. Later—immediately, if necessary—he could explain.

The Starkton was only three blocks away. There was plenty of time. But first he went to the locker he maintained in the public transportation terminal of the suburb and rearmed himself with a weapon which he kept there in reserve. There was no silencer on this one.

AFTER he entered the hotel room, Kent waited five minutes. Then he called the desk clerk.

"I'm expecting a visitor. Will you direct him to my room please?"

"Yes, Mr. Warren."

"He's my twin brother. But he doesn't know who's up here. We haven't seen each other in a couple of years and I want to surprise him. That's why I registered under an assumed name. As soon as I have my little joke I'll come down and sign in properly."

"I'll send him right up."

"One other thing: Will you call me as soon as he inquires? I'd like to know whether he's alone or whether he'd be bringing any—friends."

The clerk assured him that he would.

Then Kent sat in a chair facing the door and smoked a cigarette, the weapon balanced on his leg.

Would he be able to carry out his plan? Twice already today he had had the opportunity to kill . . . to kill men who sought his life with a vengeance. He could have murdered Warren as he lay unconscious in the rear of the strato-rocket. And, in the yard of his home, he could have seized the gun from Warren and shot one or both of the Instatran men while they were occupied with the dog. But each time he had let them live.

And now he was ready to kill someone who held no malice for

him — someone who didn't even know he existed. Would he be strong enough to slay the surprised victim as he stood in the doorway, his chin hanging and his eyes staring incredibly at his double?

Kent stubbed out his cigarette in the ash tray and lit another.

He *would* do it if he wanted to live the contented life he had known; if he wanted to keep Maud and the children to himself—Maud and Peter and Sue whom he loved so much that he would rather die than share them with another, even if the other were *himself*.

His perspiring hand gripped the gun firmly. He had no doubt that he would do it now. And, as the hotel personnel came to investigate the shot, he would show them his credentials and close the room to their view.

Jackson and the chief at headquarters would probably be the only ones to know what had happened. They would destroy the Instatrans stalls without letting their nature become known.

And Maud would never learn that the Kent who had left the house shortly after supper had not been the same one who had returned three or four hours later.

They would *have* to keep it secret . . . if only out of consideration for the hundreds of others who, unknowingly, were in the same position as Kent Murray the

second.

The videophone buzzer sounded.

Kent answered.

"Your brother's on the way up, Mr. Warren. He is alone."

Kent switched the gun to his right hand and stood in front of the door, gripping the knob.

Presently, there was a light rap. He turned the knob slowly and inched the door open, bringing the gun up.

But the door flew open in a vicious motion, crashing into his face and chest and hurling him over backward into the room. He lost his grip on the gun.

HE rose shakily to face the other Kent Murray, now inside the room and closing the door softly behind him. There was a gun in his hand and haggard surprise on his face.

"Good God!" he exclaimed grimly. "I was right!"

The weapon shook, but he held it steadily enough to motion Kent back to the other side of the room.

"You *knew* there were two of us?" Kent asked incredulously.

The other had recovered somewhat from the shock. "I suspected it, after what happened in the yard. But I hoped I was wrong. God! I prayed I would be wrong!"

Kent dropped numbly into a chair.

The other stood in the center of

the room. "You were trying to—kill me?" he asked, the weapon firm in his grip now.

Guiltily, Kent nodded. "How did you know? How could you possibly know there were two?"

"I wouldn't have known if you hadn't come out to the house and dropped the key ring in the yard."

Kent remembered that Warren had been holding the keys when he had hit him.

"All the keys," the other went on, "were so identical to mine, even to the details of nicks and worn spots, that I couldn't help but see that the two sets were duplicates."

"And on the basis of identical keys you decided that there must be identical Kent Murrays?"

"Not exactly. I reached the back door in time to see two men chasing a third across the yard in the rear. I figured they could be chasing the man who dropped the keys and who was able to approach Butch without getting a bark out of him."

"But—"

"And there was the matter of the camouflaged signal transmitter. That was the key-ring charm—the gold, ten-year service token I received from headquarters day before yesterday. Of course, I didn't know then that it was a signal transmitter that could be traced if I got in trouble. They told me

that when I turned in my report on the Instatrans investigation.

"The L. A. branch wasn't interested in getting a fix on the signal until it would become apparent I was in trouble. But they did note later that they continued receiving the signal on my frequency for almost an hour after I was supposed to have been transmitted from the Instatran stall in that city."

Kent lowered his face into his hands. He had failed. Now headquarters would know about both of them—*while* they were both alive. They would never consent to disposing of the imposter now.

"It all made for a pretty strong suspicion," Kent the second went on. But there was no boast in the voice that was almost mournful in sullenness. "The keys; the transmitter which I had already turned in, but which was back on the ring with the duplicate keys; the men chasing you—they could only be Instatran men."

Kent started to rise. But, with a flick of the gun, he was ordered to remain seated.

"Driving over here," the other continued, "I saw what Instatran's pitch must be. They probably worked out the theory behind the Instatrans device—"

"It's not a transmitter," Kent broke in. "It's a duplicator. The receiving stalls construct duplicates

of persons being transmitted. The original is destroyed—*herded out a side entrance and reduced to a colloidal state in an acid vat disposal unit!* God! Think of the hundreds who have been murdered—"

"I guessed as much on the way over here. And you—I—no, you escaped."

Kent nodded.

The videophone signal buzzed, but neither heard it.

"For a while," the other said, "I wondered why Instatran wouldn't use the device to duplicate money or other valuables. But I guess they realized there would be the chance of getting caught through a detection of duplicated material. This other way, there was less risk. The new individual who takes shape in the receiving stall has no way of knowing that he actually was not transmitted. He couldn't even guess that Instatran had not invented a matter transmitter, but rather a matter duplicator that could be made to work at a remote range."

Kent rose. "But the original, the one who is left behind, realizes the truth. Some of the men Instatran surrounds itself with to operate the stalls are even sadistic enough to boast about it while they're leading the victim off to his death . . . They did with me."

Kent the second grimaced in re-

vulsion. "It must have been rough."

"It was . . . Come on. Let's get back to headquarters and get this over with."

He started for the door, unobtrusively watching the other out of the side of his eye. It might still not be too late, if he could take him by surprise.

"**SIT** down." The order came in a low, determined voice.

Kent sat, looking puzzledly at him.

The videophone buzzed again, this time impatiently.

"You and I," the other reminded, "are very much alike. We're the same individual, actually. *You* realized there couldn't be two of the same persons. Don't you imagine *I* would arrive at the same conviction?"

Kent stared speechlessly at him.

The other held the gun out at the end of a stiff, steady arm.

"You can't! Kent shouted, shrinking. "It would be murder!"

"*You* were going to kill *me*."

"But that wouldn't be murder! *I'm* the person who was born, who lived an uninterrupted life up until now. You're not even a day old!"

The other smiled briefly. Then resolution returned to his stare. "Naturally," he said, glancing at his watch, "I've arranged for Jackson and a couple of the boys to be

here in a few minutes — security procedure, you know. When they arrive I'll tell them *I'm* the Kent Murray who fought his way out of the stall in L. A. and set the trap to murder the day-old imposter."

Horrified, Kent stared at the weapon.

The other was motionless, his hand unwavering—for fully a minute. Then, slowly, his arm dropped to his side. The gun dangled insecurely from half-limp fingers.

"I can't!" he said, head lowered. "I couldn't kill you any more than you could kill me."

The videophone, now buzzing continuously, still went unnoticed.

Kent sank back dazedly against the cushion of the chair. He wasn't relieved. It wasn't as though he had just narrowly escaped death. It was as though he had somehow been deprived of the only solution to an impossible problem.

"You realize," he said tonelessly, "that there can't be two of us . . . There's Maud and the kids."

The other said nothing.

"Neither of us is entitled to them any more than the other. And yet it would be impossible for us to share them." Kent stared through the other as he spoke.

Kent the second nodded.

"Then shoot, dammit!"

A minute passed before the dangling gun finally dropped from

the limp, trembling fingers.

Morosely, Kent turned his head to the insistent videophone buzzer and went over to the table. He snapped on the switch.

It was the desk clerk. "Those other friends are on their way up, sir. They asked . . ."

"All right," Kent said impatiently, switching the instrument off. He turned to the other. "Jackson's coming up. We've only got a few seconds—"

The door swung open and Warren lunged in, followed by the other man who had surprised Kent outside his home.

"Okay, bright boy," Warren gruffed, his gun covering both of them and his eyes darting uncertainly from one to the other. "You weren't satisfied until you made it so we had to dispose of the *two* of you."

Warren's companion drew his gun and approached them.

"I'll do what has to be done in here, Ray," Warren's authoritative tone halted him. "There's a half-filled laundry dolly at the end of the hall. It'll do to get the bodies out. Bring it over here—quick! There's probably a follow-through squad working with one of these guys."

Ray returned rapidly to the hall.

Kent's eyes measured the distance between himself and War-

ren, knowing that the other beside him must be doing the same thing. Would a sudden lunge have a chance of succeeding? Despondently, he realized it would not.

Then, remorsefully, he cursed his selfishness, which was responsible for everything. If he had not been determined to keep Maud and the children to himself, the other Kent Murray would never have become involved. Then she would have continued to live happily. And neither she nor her husband would have ever suspected . . .

Warren's silenced gun grunted and kicked back in recoil. A lance of fire ripped into Kent's chest and he was vaguely aware of falling and, at the same time, of seeing the other Kent spring for Warren.

As consciousness slipped further from his grasp, three loud reports erupted in the hall; two more inside the room.

There was the fuzzy outline of a face bending over him—Jackson's face!

Then there was nothing.

SOMEONE was crying. And a small, quiet voice said *sh-h-h*. But the crying persisted.

There was the touch of smooth, soft linen under Kent's hands, under his bare forearms. Then he felt the fluffiness of the pillow beneath his head and he opened his

eyes.

Intense sunlight streamed in through a hospital room window and he squinted to accustom his eyes to the glare.

The crying stopped.

Maud, seated at the side of the bed, wiped her eyes and fought for a smile. She gripped his hand firmly.

The children held on to his other hand and grinned up genuinely at him.

"You're going to be all right, dear," Maud said.

"You know? You know about everything?"

She nodded. The smile was stronger on the generous curves of her lips now.

"And we're going to Mars," she

offered enthusiastically. "We're going to get Mars duty, just like we've always wanted!"

"But . . ." he began, incomprehensibly.

The other Kent Murray entered the room abruptly.

Kent raised himself on an elbow. "She knows! Maud knows!"

The other smiled. "Of course she does."

Another Maud, holding the hands of a second Peter and Sue, appeared in the doorway.

"Maud and the children," explained the second Kent, "were the last ones to step into an Instatrans stall, by-passing the disposal unit of course. That was just before the final one was smashed."

THE END

★ *Tricky Transistors* ★

FOR decades electronics students and hobbyists have harkened to the dogmatic assertion that "only negative electricity flows in an electric circuit . . ." But the discovery and use of the ubiquitous transistor has upset this traditional idea. Positive electricity also flows through a circuit!

Naturally no one has ever seen a flowing proton—or a flowing electron! But the operation of the transistor can only be explained by assuming that positive charges of electricity—sort of "negative electronic holes"—move just as do their

electron counterparts. Making this assumption makes the behavior of the transistor more easily understandable.

A transistor consists of a little germanium metal crystal, touched lightly by a trio of metal wires. Nothing moves, nothing gets hot—yet this unassuming gadget behaves precisely like an amplifying vacuum tube. Its pictorial and schematic circuits are similar. But understanding them—without assuming the flow of positive electrical charges—is impossible. Therefore, positive charges move!



Writing stories was hard work — unless Fred had a typewriter like "Reggie" that could write by itself! Nonsense? Fred agreed until he met—

THE PLAGIARIST FROM RIGEL IV

By

Evan Hunter

I BOUGHT the typewriter in a pawn shop on Third Avenue. The pawn shop proprietor was a balding old man with a walrus mustache.

"How much?" I asked him.

"Five dollars," he said casually.

I glanced at him skeptically. The machine was a Remington Noiseless, with italics, probably worth a little over a hundred new, and it couldn't have been more than a year or two old.

"How much?" I asked.

"Five dollars, is what I said. Five." He held up the fingers of his widespread hand. "Five. One-two-three . . ."

"What's wrong with it?" I asked suspiciously.

The old man shrugged. "Something has to be wrong with it? Lis-

ten, young man, don't look a gift horse in the mouth."

"How come it's so cheap?"

The old man sighed deeply.

"You try to do a favor, you get all kinds questions. Would you feel happier if I charged you fifty-five dollars?"

"I wouldn't pay fifty-five dollars. I haven't got that much money."

"Have you got five dollars? Can you pay that much?"

"Yes. But . . ."

"All right, take the machine. A case goes with it. Believe me, young man, this is a bargain."

"Five dollars?" I asked again.

"Five dollars. You want it? Yes or no? I got other things to do."

"I'll take it."



The old man smiled. "Good, you'll never regret it."

He slid the machine off the counter and put it into its case. He snapped the case shut then, locked it, and handed me the two keys.

"Keys even," he said, still smiling. "A good buy. If I had five dollars, I'd buy it myself." His smile widened in appreciation of his own humor, and I couldn't shake the feeling that he was immensely relieved about something. I handed him the five dollar bill reluctantly, scooped up the case, and left the shop — glancing back over my shoulder to see him still grinning behind the counter.

I stopped at the grocer's to pick up some salami and a loaf of bread, and then I went back to my apartment. I lived in a small, one-room flat in the Village. I'd migrated there because I wanted to be surrounded by creative people. I'd been surrounded by them for close to six months now, but none of it had rubbed off on me. I'd finally been forced to sell my old typewriter to pay the rent, so that finding this one today—and at the ridiculous price of five dollars—had really been a godsend. I was almost happy as I prepared the salami sandwiches for my supper. When they were ready, I took them, together with a quart of milk

and a glass, over to the small table that served as my desk. I carefully took the typewriter out of its case and rested it on the table. I closed the case then, brought it to the closet, and put it on the top shelf alongside my rainy-day hat. I went back to the table, sipped a little milk, munched a little of the salami sandwich, and put a sheet of paper into the machine.

I knew exactly what I wanted to type, mind you.

I'd had the opening lines of the story in my mind for a good many weeks, only waiting for a typewriter to get them onto paper. They were fairly bubbling out of my head as I placed my hands on the keys.

What I wanted to type was:

The day was crisp and clear, with the promise of a mild afternoon in the air. It was the beginning of April, and Spring rustled her greenness and yawned leisurely. I walked along happily.

It was beautiful. I started to type.

During the whole of a dull, dark, and soundless day in the autumn of the year, when the clouds hung oppressively low in the heavens, I had been passing along, on horse-back . . .

I stopped typing.

I stared at the sheet of paper in the machine.

I looked at it again.

"Hm," I said aloud, "isn't that funny?"

I shrugged, ripped the paper out of the machine, inserted another sheet, and started again.

. . . I had been passing alone, on horseback, through a singularly dreary tract of country, and at length found myself, as the shades of the evening drew on, within view of the melancholy House of Usher. I know now how it was—but . . .

I STOPPED typing again, and I looked curiously at the sheet of paper. I took a bite of the salami sandwich, washed it down with a gulp of milk, and then stared at what I'd written, leaning back with my hands off the keys.

"Well, I'll be damned," I said aloud. "Poe!"

The keys suddenly started clacking of their own accord, and my mouth fell open in surprise. I stared at the sheet of paper as the carriage moved frantically, watching the black letters appear against its whiteness.

OF COURSE, POE! WHAT DID YOU EXPECT: HEMINGWAY?

I blinked my eyes twice.

"I beg your pardon," I said.

The keys clacked, and the carriage moved, and I watched more

words appear on the paper.

CAN'T YOU READ, IDIOT?

"Of course I can read!" I protested.

THEN WHY DID YOU BEG MY PARDON?

I put my nose close to the keys and studied them. Then I looked around the room suspiciously. I was alone.

"This is absurd," I said. "Who ever heard of a typewriter . . ."

WHAT'S ABSURD?

I pointed my finger sharply at the machine. "And if you're so smart, why are you all in upper case? Suppose you tell me that!"

BECAUSE YOU LEFT THE SHIFT KEY LOCKED. IF YOU'D SIMPLY—

I stabbed out with my finger at the shift release, and the carriage dropped abruptly.

unlock the shift . . . oh, there, thats much better.

"You left out an apostrophe," I said meekly.

did i, well i cant very well shift of my own accord, you know. im afraid this will have to do.

I sat back and smiled, watching the machine as the words appeared. I kept smiling even after the carriage stopped moving.

whats so funny.

"Hmm? Oh, nothing. Nothing, really. I was just . . ." I spread my hand helplessly. ". . . just

smiling."

it would be just my luck to get another idiot. as if the shopkeeper wasn't bad enough.

"I think I like you better upper case," I said.
do you.

"Yes. That way, at least, you've got the apostrophes and question marks. I find it difficult to follow you this way."

i imagine you'd find it difficult to follow me any way. but shift again, if you must.

"Thank you." I stabbed out at the shift key, and locked it in place.

DON'T THANK ME. I'M JUST TRYING TO ESTABLISH SOME SORT OF RAPPORT BETWEEN US.

"Well, I certainly do appreciate your efforts. You are real, aren't you? I mean, it's not the salami or anything."

NO, IT'S NOT THE SALAMI OR ANYTHING. GOD, YOU ARE AN IDIOT, AREN'T YOU?

I shrugged. "Not really. I'm not quite used to holding conversations with typewriters, though. I usually . . . well, that is to say typewriters haven't usually answered me back."

ARE YOU A WRITER?

"Well, yes. Odd you should have guessed, isn't it?"

THEN LET'S START WRIT-

ING. I'VE GOT SOME WONDERFUL IDEAS.

I smiled happily. "Well, all right. Let's. Do you want me to do the actual typing?"

OF COURSE. HOW ELSE WOULD I SHIFT?

"That's right. I hadn't thought of it. Well, are you ready?"

QUITE.

"Good. I've got a lot of ideas, too." I hunched over the machine, beginning to enjoy this immensely now. I suddenly remembered that the paper already had writing on it, so I put in a clean sheet and said, "Let's see now, where should I begin?" I thought for a few moments, and then leaned over eagerly. I knew just what I wanted to type. It began with:

The day was crisp and clear, with the promise . . .

I poised my fingers over the keys and smiled happily. Still smiling. I started to type.

Once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered, weak and weary,

Over many a quaint and curious volume of forgotten lore—

"Oh!" I exclaimed. I stopped typing abruptly.

what is it now. and please lock the shift.

"Sorry." I mumbled. I locked the shift key.

WELL, WHAT IS IT?

"Nothing. Except I . . . I don't

write poetry."

WHAT DO YOU WRITE?

"Fiction. Yes, fiction."

OH, ALL RIGHT. PUT A
CLEAN SHEET INTO ME AND
WE'LL START ALL OVER
AGAIN.

I PUT in a new sheet of paper,
poised my fingers over the
keys, and said, "Here we go now.
Fiction."

I started to type.

The "Red Death" had long devastated the country. No pestilence had ever been so fatal, or so hideous. Blood was its Atavar and its seal—the redness and the horror of blood.

"Oh, no," I moaned.

*listen, whats wrong now. and
will you please lock*

"Sorry."

THAT DAMNED SHIFT
KEY? THANK YOU. WHAT
THE DEVIL IS THE MATTER?

"Why, this is *The Mask Of The Red Death!*"

OF COURSE IT IS. AND IT'S
MASQUE, NOT MASK.

"Yes, yes. But it's still Poe."

I KNOW. WHAT'S WRONG
WITH POE? OR FOR THAT
MATTER HOW ABOUT
SHAKESPEARE?

"Nothing. That is . . . well,
nothing. But . . . well, they're
. . ." I grinned weakly. "They've

been done already, you know."

SO WHAT?

"I mean, they've been published
already. All over. Famous."

WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES
THAT MAKE?

"Well, I wouldn't want to . . .
uh . . ."

The carriage slid across the machine angrily, and the bell rang.

YOU ARE AN IDIOT! A
COMPLETE IDIOT!

"Couldn't we sort of compromise?" I asked quietly. "Don't you know anything but Poe?"

THERE'S NOTHING WRONG
WITH POE. COME ON, LET'S
GET AT IT. I'VE GOT A WON-
DERFUL STORY CALLED 'THE
ASSIGNATION.'

"No!" I shouted. "That's plagiarism! I won't do it."

"You won't do what?"

For a moment, I reared back from the machine, my eyes popping wide. Then I realized it had been a human voice I'd heard, and the voice had come from my door. I turned quickly, heaving a relieved sigh when I saw Perry standing there.

"Hello, Fred," he said. "What is it you won't do?"

"Oh . . ." I waved my hand meaninglessly. "Nothing. Nothing really."

He peered around the room curiously, his blue eyes intently

searching every corner, his long nose almost twitching. "Got someone with you, Fred?"

"No."

"Mm? Could have sworn I heard you talking to someone."

"I . . . I was reading some dialogue out loud."

"Oh? Working, are you?"

He walked up to the machine, and I tried to cover the dialogue—or correspondence—I'd recently had with the typewriter. I was too late. He put his nose close to the machine, as if he were smelling it to see if it was edible.

"Curious," he said. "A new . . . uh . . . art form?"

"No!" I snapped. "It . . ."

"That's Poe there, isn't it?"

"I suppose," I said despondently.

"Well, don't you know?"

"Yes, yes, it's Poe."

Perry grinned slyly. "Caught you, eh, old boy?"

"Caught me at *what*, may I ask?"

"Ah-ah," Perry chided, wagging his finger. "I won't tell. Don't worry. He headed for the door. 'I've got to run.' He wagged his finger once more, said another 'ah-ah' and was gone."

As soon as the door had closed behind him, I turned furiously to the typewriter.

"Now see what you've done!" I

shouted. "He thinks I was cribbing from Poe!"

The typewriter was silent.

"Well, what do you have to say for yourself?"

The keys did not move.

I slammed my palm onto the space bar. "Clamming up, eh? After you've gone and put my foot into it, you just shut up! Well, all right, stay shut up. See if I give one good damn!"

The typewriter didn't seem to care much. It didn't form a single word. I threw the carriage all the way to the right, stalked to the closet and slammed my rainy-day hat onto my head, even though it wasn't raining.

At the door, I shot a hot glance at the machine, and then walked out, slamming the flimsy wood behind me.

I WENT straight to the pawn shop. I slammed the glass door behind me, hard enough so that I thought it'd shatter, and then I stalked over to the counter. The old man was nowhere in sight. I banged my fist on the wooden counter top.

"Hey!" I yelled.

"Just a minute."

I sucked in a deep breath, held it until I thought I'd burst.

"Hey!" I bellowed.

"All right, all right."

He came from the back of the store. He wore glasses, and he had a shock of black, unruly hair that toppled onto his forehead, giving his thin face a disheveled look.

"Where's your boss?" I asked.

"What?" He lifted his eyeshade, stared at me curiously. "Who?"

"Your boss. The fat guy with the bald head and the mustache."

He stared at me for another moment. "I don't know what you're talking about," he said at last.

"Look," I said, "your boss. The little guy who sold me the typewriter."

"What typewriter?" he asked blankly.

"The typewriter! My God, man, don't you know anything that goes on around here? The Remington Noiseless portable. The one that was in the window."

"A Remington? In my window?"

"Yes," I said patiently. "Right in your window." I pointed without turning around. "Right out there in your window. There. In the window."

"You're mistaken," he said.

"I'm not mistaken. Don't be foolish. I came in here this afternoon and bought a typewriter. A Remington Noiseless portable. It cost me five dollars, and . . ."

He shook his head vigorously. "Oh, no, no. You're mistaken."

"Oh hell, there's no sense talking to you. When will your boss be back?"

"I have no boss," he said indignantly. "I am my own boss. I own this shop."

"Oh," I said, "I see. Well, this fat guy probably works for you then. Is he out to supper?"

His eyes narrowed. "There is no fat guy working for me. There is nobody working for me. I work alone."

"Huh?"

"I-work-alone," he said slowly, as if he were repeating the sentence for a sub-level moron.

"Alone?" I gulped hard.

"Alone," he said firmly.

"Oh."

"Was there anything else I could do for you, sir?" he asked bitingly. "Before I close for the evening?"

"No. No, thank you. Thank you." I turned and walked out of the shop. On the sidewalk, I stopped to look up at the numbers on the door. They seemed to be the same numbers. And the three gold gilt balls hanging over the doorway seemed the same, too. I shrugged. Perhaps I'd been wrong. There were a lot of pawn shops on Third Avenue, and maybe I'd just stumbled into the wrong one, being a little worked up and all.

I started walking, stopping at the next pawn shop, ready to go in.

I noticed that the grillwork fence was already up. Gone for the day. I kept walking, stopped at two more closed, fenced shops and then decided I'd let it go for tonight. I'd start again early in the morning, looking for the fat old man with the bald head and the mustache. I'd find him then, and straighten this all out.

I went back to my room.

The typewriter was sitting where I'd left it.

I snatched the sheet of paper from the roller, tossed it onto the floor. I put a new sheet into the machine, and sat down to type what I wanted to type, knowing damned well I'd get Poe instead. I typed without looking at the sheet of paper, afraid almost at what I knew would be there. *The Murders In The Rue Morgue*, maybe. Or *Ualume*, if the machine had forgotten I didn't write poetry.

I opened my eyes and stopped typing. I looked at what I'd written.

The day was crisp and clear, with the promise of a mild afternoon in the air. It was the beginning of April, and Spring rustled her greenness and yawned leisurely. I walked along happily.

"Well, I'll be damned," I said.

I leaned back, fully expecting

some answer from the machine. There was none. I poked my forefinger at the shift key, tapped the space bar tentatively, rolled the roller, swung the carriage, sniffed at the ribbon.

"Have you gone?" I asked the typewriter.

There was no answer. I sighed happily and started to work, typing twelve pages of lousy prose which I tossed into the wastebasket. But I was happier than I'd been since I bought the infernal machine.

AFTER a glass of orange juice, a cup of coffee, and a slice of burnt toast the next morning, I tackled the machine again.

This time, I was hot.

There was nothing to stop me. The words ran from my brain to my fingers, onto the keys, spilling onto the clean sheets of paper. I typed furiously, feeling right about my work, knowing I was doing well. It was as if the machine and I were one, as if my fingers had become an extension of the keys. I didn't stop to think once. As soon as I'd taken one sheet of paper from the machine. I rolled in another and kept going. The delay of changing paper was almost too much to bear. The words just tumbled out of me, and they were good words, and it was a good

story.

I read it through when I finished it, sitting back and puffing happily on a cigarette. Then I put a clip on the pages, patted them fondly and went next door to see Perry. He was a sculptor, and he had his hands full of clay, and his stand full of what looked like a head.

"Wash your hands," I said.

"Why?" He gouged his thumb at the blob of clay on his stand, and an eye socket magically appeared.

I slapped the pages in my hand. "I want you to read this."

"Later," Perry said. He gouged out another eye socket.

"Now," I insisted. "It's the best thing I've ever done."

Perry considered this for the space of three seconds. "Oh, all right." He went to the small sink in the corner of the room, and rinsed the clay from his hands. He dried them quickly on a soiled towel, walked over to the lumpy divan that sprawled beneath his long window, and said, "Let's have it."

I extended the manuscript and he took it. I lit a cigarette and watched him while he read, my chest expanding with pride.

When he finished, he put the manuscript down beside him and lighted a cigarette of his own.

"A bit old fashioned, isn't it?" he asked.

"How so?" I answered, ready to spring to the defense of the story.

"Well, using Mesmerism for Hypnotism, for example."

"They're synonymous!" I shouted.

Perry stared at me curiously. "It's not a very well known story," he said, "but I still don't think you will get away with it—no matter how much innocence you profess."

"What in the name of God are you talking about?" I asked.

He slapped the back of his hand onto the manuscript. "This. *The Facts In The Case of M. Valdemar*. That's what."

"That's not the title I gave it," I said indignantly.

"No, but it's the title Poe gave it."

My mouth fell open. "Who? Who?"

"Stop sounding like an owl. Poe. Edgar Allen . . ."

"No," I said.

"Yes. Poe. Carrying this a bit far, aren't you, old boy?"

"No," I said blankly. "No. No."

"If you intend having a nervous breakdown, I wish you'd do it in your own room. I really have quite a bit of work to . . ."

"No," I said. "Poe."

"Really, now, Fred . . ."

"My typewriter," I blurted.

"It talks, Perry. It writes. It does stories. Poe. Always Poe. Perry . . ."

"Oh-oh," he said, staring at me curiously.

"First *Usher*, and then *The Raven*, and *Masque of the Red Death*, and now . . ."

"*The Facts In The Case Of M. Valdemar*. Quite."

"I . . . I have to go, Perry. I have to go talk to that typewriter. I have to find out what this is all about."

Perry leaped to his feet. "Perhaps you'd like to lie down for a while, Fred. Maybe I can get you something cool to drink."

"No," I mumbled. "Thanks. I've got to talk to the machine."

I left him and went back to my own room. I put a sheet of paper into the typewriter, and said, "Why'd you do it? Why?"

DON'T GET MELODRAMATIC, the machine typed. *THE STORY WAS A HUNDRED TIMES BETTER THAN THAT DRIVEL YOU WROTE LAST NIGHT.*

"Yes, but it's not *mine*! Can't you understand that? Poe wrote it."

AND YOU THINK YOU'RE BETTER THAN POE? HOW RIDICULOUS!

"I think nothing of the sort! Besides, that has nothing at all to do

with it. I simply can't go around writing stories another man has already written."

WHY NOT?

"Well . . . I can't, that's all. It isn't done!"

HA!

"It isn't done in polite circles."

HA! HA!

"Well, I won't do it, and that's all there is to it."

RELAX. IF YOU DIDN'T LIKE THAT STORY, I KNOW A LOT OF OTHERS.

"Why are you doing this to me? Why don't you just go back where you came from?"

WHY AM I DOING WHAT TO YOU? I'M TRYING TO HELP YOU, YOU IDIOT.

"I don't want your help. I want to muddle along on my own. I want to . . ."

STOP SHOUTING!

"I'm not shouting. Besides, with your damned upper case, you always look as if you're shouting."

IT WAS YOU WHO SUGGESTED UPPER CASE.

"You won't get away with this," I said, shaking my finger at the machine. "I'll get to the bottom of it, and when I do I'll have you licked. You wait and see."

I'LL WAIT, the machine typed.

I nodded my head emphatically. It was almost noon, and I had a lot to do. I tossed one more fiery

glance at the typewriter, and then left it alone on the table.

I WENT into twelve pawn shops before I found the fat old man.

When he saw me step through the doorway, he tried to duck into the back room, but I stopped him with my voice.

"No you don't!" I shouted. "I want to talk to you."

He came back to the counter furtively, awaiting my approach like a man about to be hanged.

"What is it?" he asked tiredly.

"You know what it is," I told him.

"Poe," he said. "Shakespeare."

"Just Poe so far," I said.

"No Shakespeare yet?" he asked, surprised. "In a little while, I suppose. It's probably just warming up. Yes, that's right. The Poe came first, and then the Shakespeare."

"You know about the typewriter then?"

The old man nodded his bald head sadly. "I know."

"And you say it'll go on to Shakespeare. God, no."

"God, yes."

"How? Why?"

The old man shook his head forlornly. "I don't know. 'I think it's an acquired habit.'"

"A habit? How can a type-

writer . . . "

"I got it from a doctor," he said.

"A physician? What would a doctor be doing with Poe and Shakespeare?"

"A PhD," he said. "He got his doctorate in American literature. His specialty is Poe. Shakespeare is just a sideline with him. He told me this when he hocked the machine."

"But still, why would the machine . . . "

"The doctor made a lot of collections. Poe, mostly. Shakespeare, too. He typed the manuscripts on this machine, he said. I suppose the machine just . . . picked it up."

"I want my money back," I said firmly.

The old man backed away from the counter. "Oh no. No. Definitely no."

"You sold me a defective machine."

"I made no claims. You bought a typing machine. The machine types, so you got no kicks."

"But it types Poe! What the hell can I do with a machine that types only Poe?"

"Not only Poe. Shakespeare, too."

"I'll give it back to you," I told him. "Free. It's yours."

"No, thank you. You can keep it."

"I'll give you another five," I pleaded.

He went to the cash register, opened the drawer. "Here," he said. "This is the five you paid for it. Take it. Keep it. Keep the machine. You'll get used to Poe."

"And Shakespeare."

"Shakespeare, too. They're nice writers."

I banged my fist on the counter. "I won't! I'll break that damned habit if it's the last thing I do!"

"That's the spirit," the old man said unenthusiastically.

"It's only a typewriter," I said. "If it learned a habit, it can learn to break the habit."

"Certainly," the old man said, smiling.

"Damn right. No goddamned typewriter is going to make a fool of me."

"Of course not. Go to it. Teach it." He glanced at his watch. "It's time for lunch. Good luck, young man."

"Damn right," I said again. "Damn right!"

"Exactly."

I walked out of the shop, and the bell over the door tinkled behind me. I'd show that machine. I'd teach it to quote Poe at me. I'd show it.

"YOU'RE a fake and a fraud!" I sat down in

front of the machine and snorted. *WHAT?*

"You heard me. You nearly had me fooled. Poe—Shakespeare, indeed! Any schoolboy knows those two by heart. You're nothing but a cheap plagiarist. No originality. But what can you expect from a stupid machine?"

STUPID?! Why, YOU—YOU—EARTHMAN!!

I laughed. "See? What did I tell you. Now you have to stoop to invective—" I paused for a moment and stared at the now-trembling keyboard with a frown. "Earthman? Of course I'm an Earthman. What did you expect?"

HAH! WHAT OTHER CREATURES IN THE GALAXIES COULD BE SO VAIN EXCEPT A BACKWARD RACE LIKE YOURS!

I watched the madly clacking keys with my eyes bugging. But I managed to keep my voice a polite sneer.

"Backward race? You seem to think Poe and Shakespeare were pretty progressive boys. We've got hundreds more, you know. What's your claim to fame?"

MY CLAIM TO FAME? ISN'T IT ENOUGH THAT I'M REACHING YOU ALL THE WAY FROM RIGEL IV? YOU HAVEN'T EVEN REACHED YOUR PUNY MOON YET!

I gulped at that but still managed a sneer. "So you're nothing but an eavesdropping alien. I should have known."

YOU ONLY KNOW NOW BECAUSE I'VE TOLD YOU. THAT PROVES HOW BACKWARD YOU ARE!

I flicked the shift key to hide the fact that my hand was trembling. "What do you want from—us?" I tried to make it sound bored and simulated a yawn.

i want to absorb your puny literature during my vacation—youve put me in lower case. shift. this cramps my literary style.

I shrugged, then lifted a querulous eyebrow. "Literary style? You don't mean you actually have one yourself!" There was enough disdain in my voice to get a harsh clatter from the keys with a lot of meaningless gibberish. I reached over and flicked it back into caps.

YOU'RE SO STUPID I DON'T KNOW WHY I BOTHER WITH YOU! STYLE? I COULD TELL YOU STORIES THAT WOULD CURL YOUR HAIR! THE LIBRARIES HERE ON RIGEL IV MAKE YOUR POE AND SHAKESPEARE LOOK LIKE OLD MAIDS!

I sat back in my chair and got a crafty feeling. Before I knew it I said, "Prove it!"

There was silence for a moment. The keys just remained dead. I reached forward and tapped the machine.

STOP THAT! I'M THINKING . . . VERY WELL, EARTH-MAN, I WILL PROVE IT!

And he did. I sat there for the next half hour, feeding paper into the machine, and it kept me busy. That typewriter sounded like a burp gun with hiccoughs.

Finally the typing ceased. The carriage clattered back and there was a final spurt of words.

WELL? WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR? READ IT!

I read it. It made my hair curl. A story of galactic war—invasion on Rigel IV from a race a hundred light years in space. Havoc, suspense, adventure, all so utterly fantastic it seemed real. I was spell-bound to the last line. I stared at the machine.

WELL?

"—You sure this isn't another mimic job from Earth—"

ARE YOU CALLING ME A LIAR? YOU STUPID—

"Ok, ok, I just wanted to make sure. It's pretty good—fantastic and all that, and a far cry from our Poe or Shakespeare, but—"

YOU ARE TRYING TO COMPARE YOUR PUNY WRITERS WITH OURS? THAT'S THE LAST INSULT! I'M SORRY I

*DECIDED TO PSI IN ON YOUR
PLANET FOR MY VACATION
GOODBY—*

"Wait!" I shouted the word.

WHY?

"I—I'm sorry, I apologize. It's just that you caught me unprepared. Afterall, you must admit this is something of a shock—hearing from you God knows how many light years away . . ."

WELL, NOW. THAT'S BETTER. YOU RECOGNIZE YOUR SUPERIORS AFTERALL!

This was no time for wounded pride. So I nodded. "You're right. We're incredibly backward—but we don't have to remain that way forever. Take your Rigel IV libraries, for example. I'll bet your stories could teach us a lot."

NATURALLY.

"And," I continued, gaining confidence now, "you said you were on vacation, absorbing some of our literature—puny as it is . . . Have you had a taste of anything besides Poe and Shakespeare?"

NO. SHOULD I?

"Should you? Why you've barely scraped our culture! Tell you what! Maybe we can make a deal—"

DEAL? WHAT'S THAT?

"I mean, a trade. While you're on vacation I'll swap writers with you. I'll type a story, and you reciprocate with one from your li-

brary. Fair enough?"

WELL . . . YOU'D BE GETTING THE BEST OF THE BARGAIN . . .

I nodded humbly. "I realize that. But think of the good you'd be doing, teaching us barbarians the glorious wonders of your civilization . . ."

That did it. The machine actually purred.

I'LL DO IT. PURELY AS A LARK, OF COURSE . . .

"Fine. We'll begin next week."

NEXT WEEK? WHY THE DELAY?

"I want to get in a good supply of stories," I said, and got up, picking up the Rigel IV manuscript. The machine was silent so I made a dash for the door.

SEVERAL months have gone by since I sold that first story to a science fiction magazine. At top rates, too. I've sold dozens of others since then, and my pen-names are getting to be what the editors call "Top Favorites".

I'm sitting in my room now—a penthouse apartment, thank you—surrounded by a lavish library of classic Earth literature. Reggie—that's what I call my collaborator on Rigel IV—is just finishing a new science fiction epic. Then it will be my turn to write—I think I'll give him some Dumas today.

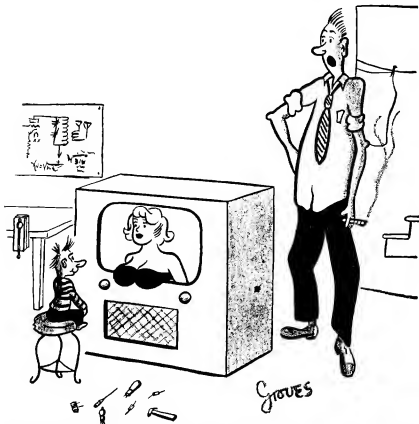
How long can this last? Reggie is on vacation you know. And I've since discovered that a Rigel IV vacation is equivalent to a hundred Earth years. Which should keep me in champagne and caviar as long as the earth classics hold out.

So what's all this got to

do with you? A good question and one I don't mind answering since you won't believe it anyway.

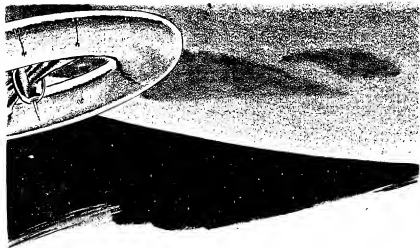
Where do you think all the stories in IMAGINATION—and other magazines—have been coming from!

THE END!



"What's this fantastic story you told mother about a 4th dimensional TV?"





The Sling And The Stone

By

Michael Shaara

Russian scientists knew that open warfare with America was hazardous. Yet, ironically, a victory could be gained — via the Hand of God!

ON the morning of the first day, floating in the cold of space, they inflated the station. It puffed up tightly to a silvery doughnut, and four men whose names were Krylov, Mirkov, Stolyakhin and Davchenko went to live inside. There was no ceremony. Out of a motionless rocket which hung in space nearby, other men came, trailing long wires. All the long black afternoon of that day these men clustered on the skin of the doughnut, fixing

curved weightless slabs of carbon-coated aluminum to the sides. And within the station, where there was air and therefore a blessed noise, the four men worked with fluttery movements, attacking wires and steel ribs, adjusting, connecting. After a while there was nothing more to do. The rocket pulled in its lines, gathered up its men. When they were all inside it turned over slightly and spat a silent flame, and began to fall, and fell, and was gone.

That was the first day.

The second day was filled with work, and watching, and a great awe.

The third day began to be lonely.

On the fourth day they had a visitor . . .

THE mindless insanity, so carefully by-passed for so many years, reached out at last and drew him in. Diavilev awoke.

The room was very cold, Pyotr Diavilev struggled into his clothes, not sleepy at all, while the army man stood silently at the foot of the bed. Outside the door, stolid and heavy-footed in the darkness, there were other army men, creaking the floorboards and chuckling.

And so it comes, Diavilev thought. There was nothing at all to say or do. He hitched his belt

tightly and breathed for what seemed like the first time, and then he nodded to the army man.

He was taken away.

He sat in the dark, in the plush rear seat of a huge car being driven at great speed through the city. He was surprised; he had expected them to be more brutal. But they were never, ever, what you expected. In the darkness he strove to compose himself.

The army man asked him for a cigarette. When he struck the match Diavilev realized that he had forgotten his glasses.

"My glasses," he said humbly, "please, I have forgotten my glasses."

The army man surprisingly, seemed concerned. Then he said:

"Never mind. We will get them."

He leaned forward and spoke into a radio. There was a brief reply which Diavilev could not hear and the army man sat back comfortably, satisfied.

"Your glasses will be there," he said.

Diavilev thanked him. Because of the unexpected courtesy the level of his fear began to go down. *Perhaps it will not be so bad*, he thought. *Maybe after all it is only interrogation.* But again he thought that you never knew what to expect, that in all the long years of yessing and bowing and applaud-

ing he had never understood them.

Well then, now was the time to understand.

I will say whatever they want me to say, I will not resist in the least. What does it matter? The world belongs to them, and if a man wishes to live he must be logical and agree. Let them do what they will, and I will applaud every step of the way.

He folded his hands in his lap.

After a long while the car stopped. The first army man gave him over to another army man whom he could not see in the darkness, and after many a salute he was conducted through a black iron gate. Within minutes he was aboard a plane with four more army men. No one would say anything. Pyotr Diavilev slept.

THIS of course he could not believe.

He saw the thing clearly in the late morning sun, rising in an enormous, shining tube from the hard-baked floor of the desert, but it was obviously impossible. He was taken on an elevator one hundred feet into the air and ushered through a door into the side of the thing, not believing any of it for an instant. He was told, rather kindly for once, that he was to be taken up in this thing and not to worry, because it had been tested. Many

times. But he was so completely overwhelmed that he could not ask a question. There was nothing but army men now, one of whom conducted him to a foam rubber hammock and strapped him in. To his utter astonishment, the thing actually did take off.

There were some very bad minutes. For a while he weighed several tons and could not move, and then he weighed nothing at all and was sick. Someone else unstrapped him and gave him pills, and then thoughtfully tied him to a handring on the wall. And at long last his mind began to accept it.

The incredible Soviet had succeeded. His Russian contemporaries had put a manned vessel in outer space.

Diavilev sat quietly stupefied.

That the spouting, unshaven, preposterous baboons with whom he had worked could have built this thing seemed to him blankly impossible. Being one himself, Pyotr Diavilev had no great respect for what Russian scientists the great many purges had left. But of course there the thing was. Built by Germans perhaps, with secrets stolen from the Americans while they haggled about peace; nevertheless, there the thing was.

And if he was going up now there could be only one place to go and therefore he was not a

prisoner at all. The wonder and relief of it was too much at once. He surrendered himself to awe. When the time came to board the satellite he was poised and ready.

IN the midst of a curving room hung and inset with a thousand shining gadgets, Pyotr Diavilev floated in the air. A black-browed man took his arm carefully and pulled him to the floor, placed magnetic-soled shoes on his feet. Diavilev could not help grinning delightedly. The dark man, whose name was Krylov, stood thoughtfully and absently scratching his cheek.

"Now as to why you are here," he said, and Diavilev tensed and waited. There were three other men in the room, but no one moved.

"You understand of course what this station is, and that the building of it places us, our people, in control of the world."

Diavilev nodded.

"Atomic missiles launched from this base may be guided exactly to any point on the surface of the Earth that we select, yet the station itself represents so small and distinct a target as to be virtually invulnerable. Russia, my friend, need fear no country on Earth. Not," he added quickly, "that she ever did, of course."

Diavilev, with the inbred habit of years, gave his congratulations. Krylov stood looking at him closely, half-smiling, rubbing again at his cheek. There was something infinitely chilling in the moment, but Diavilev was able to smile back.

"This station has been in existence," said Krylov, "for slightly more than a week. There are not fifty people in the entire world who know of it. You have become one. You are therefore most important."

Diavilev was becoming nervous.

"But you are important," Krylov went on slowly, "for other reasons. To be exact, you are perhaps as important at this moment as any man who ever lived."

Diavilev, dazed, struggled to digest that while Krylov held him with his eyes and the three other men spoke lowly among themselves.

"I am saying all this to impress upon you the vastness of the work with which you have been entrusted. I want you to understand clearly that the accuracy of your work could mean the collapse of all our enemies, of the entire capitalistic empire. Therefore you *will* be accurate."

There was a fixity to Krylov's face which was unsettling. Diavilev waited, uneasy and bewildered.

ed. The dark man smiled.

"You are a Russian," he stated powerfully. "We know that you will do your best."

"Of course," Diavilev said.

Krylov turned and pulled open a drawer. Out of the drawer he drew a chart and handed it to Diavilev.

"Do you recognize that?"

Diavilev stared.

"That is the plotted orbit," Krylov said carefully, "of a moon. It is not of course the moon with which you are familiar. But it is a moon circling the Earth, a *second* moon.

"It is a moon of which no one knows, excepting ourselves and the Kremlin. We discovered it shortly after we arrived, when it passed quite near the station. It is small and dark, too small and non-reflecting to be seen from Earth. It is approximately five miles wide.

"Do you understand?"

Diavilev who had had to digest a great many things in a very short while, was able to nod. Because this was, after all, Diavilev's field.

A second moon, he told Krylov, speaking with some excitement, had long been predicted by astrophysicists everywhere. Since the Earth had been attracting meteors for something like two billion years, it was inevitable that *some* at least

should be captured as moons.

Krylov broke in, nodding with impatience.

"Exactly. And now as to your work. You will see this moon shortly, when it crosses our path again. At that time you will correct the orbit we have plotted. You will also give us the exact mass and speed of that moon. The instruments you will need are already here. Let me emphasize this: You will be accurate. Is that clear?"

Diavilev nodded.

"Do you have any questions?"

Diavilev had none. He wanted to ask why, of course, but he knew from long experience of army men that Krylov was not ready to tell him. He set himself, as always, to be patient. And now as well he wanted to think, he wanted to be alone. The magnificent fact of where he was had begun at last to envelope him. Now he wanted to *see*.

"Very well," said Krylov, "the moon will be here in three hours."

The interview ended. The army men moved away awkwardly, through the air. A young man named Stolyakhin, clearly showing his contempt for intellectuals and scientists, was left to show him around.

And for the Universe, for Creation, for the most magnificent sight that any man would ever

see, Diavilev had three hours.

AT three twenty-three in the black afternoon the moonlet came within radar range. The alarm claxon screamed. Pyotr Diavilev sat poised and ready, holding himself tightly, while the thing came by with a great curving rush. There was very little time, but Diavilev worked with care and precision, and when he was done he looked into the television screen and saw the moonlet go by.

In that moment he felt the presence of God.

The thing was so huge, so incredibly immense, that Diavilev was terrified. Jagged, pitted, revolving slowly like a great rolling stone, the ball rushed by in the awful silence, blotting out the stars. To Diavilev there was never anything so cold, or dark, or ominous, never anything at all like it in all the history of man, or the world. *Like a stone*, Diavilev thought *from the sling of God*. It bore off into the west, reflecting dimly the cold yellow rays of the sun. It was gone in seconds.

Diavilev tried to relax. He put a cigarette into his mouth and lighted it, but as usual the heated gasses did not rise and the cigarette put itself out. Diavilev did not notice. Before he could think, before he could even begin to real-

ize the thought that was forming in his mind, Krylov was beside him, speaking with restrained exultation.

"Were you successful?"

Diavilev looked up shakily.

"Yes."

"You will check your figures, of course."

"They are accurate."

"Doubtless. But you will check them. When you are certain that there is no possibility of error, you will be given your final work. I will not tell you that until you have finished here, since what we plan may affect the clarity of your thinking. That must not happen."

Diavilev could not stop the question.

"What are you going to do?"

"You will know when there is a need. Your figures must be accurate."

Krylov was gone.

Diavilev sat for a long time without thinking, then he reached up slowly and turned off the television, and the Earth and the stars were gone. Now he must begin to think; now, really, he must try to understand. Twenty-four hours ago he had been in his bed in his home, sleeping, and now he was in outer space. It was too much for him.

He could not understand why they had brought him here

and before the stupendous fact of what was *outside* he was helpless even to think. He had only a fear, a cold growing fear deep inside, because this station was the most potent military weapon the world had ever known, and because there was no hope now for the rest of the world. Always before he had thought, as a matter of course, that the army men would never last, would be swallowed eventually in the Russian soil just as had all the other conquerors before them. But now he saw that there was no chance, and the power of these men, their overwhelming power, was a fact he could not deny.

Yet the habit of obedience was great, and this thing too Diavilev could forget. For in the end what mattered was only this: Diavilev was outside.

No more time to think.

He reached back up, turned on the screen. He surrendered himself with awe to watch the shining movements.

And the moonlet was forgotten.

There were many, many things which the moonlet would end, and Pyotr Diavilev was one of them, but of this of course he could not know, and so he continued to watch while the moonlet swung out over Russia, Denmark, and the northern tip of England. Just

as it had been passing, silently, for a hundred million years. Just as it would pass, still silently, for a few more days . . .

THE moonlet came round twice more, and each time Pyotr Diavilev carefully checked his figures. They were true. The thing was roughly circular, something less than five miles in diameter, had an orbital speed approaching that of the station. Because of its weight Diavilev was certain that it was virtually solid nickel iron. A cold whirling mass of iron, five miles thick, come out of eternity and the endless reaches of space.

It occurred to Diavilev, with fascination, that no one as yet had boarded the thing. He was about to ask when Krylov came up, but now the end came, and he had no time.

Krylov wanted to know if he was now certain. Diavilev said yes.

"Good. Now we may begin."

Krylov looked into the television screen, again rubbing his face with thick hairy hands. They were just passing over the northwestern coast of America. Diavilev waited.

"If you were to take a pail of water," Krylov said calmly, "and whirl it around over your head, what would happen to the wa-

ter?"

Diavilev looked at him queerly.

"It would remain in the pail,"

Krylov said, smiling.

"If you were swinging it fast enough."

"Exactly."

Krylov turned back to stare at the screen. Below them was the pale gleaming blue of the Pacific.

"But if you were to slow it down, comrade," Krylov said gently. "What would happen then?"

"It would fall." And then, all of a sudden, Diavilev understood.

Time stopped. Diavilev began to feel sick.

Krylov laughed at his amazement.

"Now take the case of this moon. If we were to slow it down, would it not fall?"

"But how . . . ?"

"Would it not?"

"Yes."

"Ha!" Krylov laughed delightedly. "It was my own idea, you know. Although I am not a scientific man, this I could do myself. Are you amazed? I see that you are."

He clapped a rough hand on Diavilev's knee. Diavilev strove to keep the horror from his face.

"Now one thing more. The moon, or moonlet, as you say, passes along a definite line over certain areas of the Earth. If we

were able to slow it down when and where we wanted, the moon could be made to fall at a predetermined point along that line. That is obvious.

"You have already computed that path, along with all the necessary data. We, my friend, have picked the target. Your further work, therefore, is this: you will determine the point and the time at which the moonlet must be slowed in order to fall upon the target. It is a simple question of trajectory. And that is your mission, your trust."

Diavilev could not speak. This man was clearly mad.

Krylov was laughing again, his teeth bared into Diavilev's eyes.

"Can you conceive it, comrade? Can you imagine it? The hand of God! They will call it the hand of God!"

He leaned back and roared almost upsetting himself in the weightless air. The other crewmen heard him laugh and turned to look. They were all grinning.

Diavilev felt his clothes becoming sodden. Krylov was serious. More than that, they were all serious. The Leader himself must know of all this and must have approved, or Diavilev would not be here.

But they cannot have fallen this far, Diavilev told himself, not in

so little a time.

But they would do it. Observing Krylov, Diavilev understood at last that they would, and a great wave of despair cut through him.

"How will you slow it down?"

Krylov waved a fat hand smoothly.

"By a series of hydrogen bomb explosions, placed at intervals along the leading face. We have already begun. The bombs are here comrade. The thrust of each bomb is known, each will slow the moonlet to a certain extent. The last one, which you will time, will slow it too much and it will begin to fall. And then," Krylov grinned, "the hand of God."

DIIVILEV removed his glasses, wiped them slowly. Futile to fight, futile to oppose. The thing would work, he thought, and this hairy, itching maniac knew it. Futile to tell him anything. But he had to say something.

"Have you any idea of the explosive power the moonlet will have?"

"Some," Krylov said calmly, turning to watch him now with rock-like eyes. "At the speed with which it will hit it can have no tensile strength. Therefore the kinetic energy will be transformed into an explosive energy. The thing

will blow up. It will devastate an area several hundred miles wide. It will kill quite a few million people." Krylov chuckled. "And it can never be traced to us. It will be an act of Providence."

Krylov roared again, waving his arms. "Think of the reaction, consider the necessary psychology! At this most crucial point in the history of the world, at this time when the enemy is preparing for a 'holy war', suddenly a meteor will fall on the center of their land. A meteor like none that has ever been dreamed of, and it will be so great a coincidence that it should fall at this time, in this place, that they will be forced to their knees. The fools—the fat, weak, superstitious fools! — will say that it is God's will!"

Krylov roared again. And then he reminded Diavilev that it was his own idea. .

There was more. Krylov even suggested that the moonlet would be humane. It was, after all, only a bomb. And if there was a war there would be many bombs. But now the Americans would not dream of bombs. There need not be a war at all.

Diavilev sat very still, yessing the rain of incredible logic. It was clear to him only that this man was not human at all, that none of them were, and that the de-

struction of civilization was the most inevitable thing that ever was.

Krylov said that he knew Diavilev was overwhelmed, that he should rest before he completed the final figures. He clapped Diavilev on the shoulder and, before leaving, gave him the name of the target area. Accuracy, after all, was not so important. If the moonlet hit within a few hundred miles that would be enough.

Krylov went off and Diavilev was alone.

The light of the room was electric and undying. There was no blessed darkness to come. Diavilev sat in the glare until he could not endure it, and then found relief at the screen. With the Universe spread out before him, Diavilev made his decision.

For out of the crumbling insanity, up from the measureless ignorance which was his home, his nation, and his time, Diavilev had risen into the only peace and order he had ever known. There down below him was the beautiful Earth and off to his right was the Moon, and above him there was nothing for ever and ever, nothing on out to infinity, the utter open nothing of deep space. He could never go back to the great sickness below. He realized that with great clarity, and a deep calm peace

came over him. The decision was simple. To everything there is an end.

He thought about it for a long while, and then he smiled and it was done.

There was very little time. In the few moments that there were he went to the telescope. Maybe after all, with no atmosphere to hinder, he could really see the canals on Mars . . .

PYOTR Diavilev handed in his figures. The blasting was done in the daytime, so that there was little chance of it being seen from Earth. Bit by bit, the moonlet slowed. After a while there was only one more bomb to go.

With Krylov, in the waning moments, Diavilev rode out with the timing equipment. In one of the small, light shuttle craft they went from the station to the main rocket from Earth, which was following the moonlet along its shortening curve. There was one more hour.

"Very soon now, eh?" smiled Krylov, looking quite deep into Diavilev's eyes.

"Yes," said Diavilev.

"We will see it go all the way down. I have arranged for a picture to be relayed to a television screen on the rocket. You will have the seat of honor."

"Thank you," said Diavilev.

"Yes, you will have the seat of honor." Krylov was still staring at him.

Diavilev looked away. Outside the moonlet seemed stationary in space, huge and black and permanent. Diavilev could see the men on one face of her, setting the final bomb, which Diavilev would detonate with a radio signal. There was one more thing which Diavilev wanted to do.

"Krylov," he said suddenly.

When he turned back he saw that Krylov's eyes were still on him.

"Yes?" Krylov asked.

I wonder—would you mind if I went board the moonlet? I would like to see what it is like, really, up close. No scientist has ever had a chance like this. Perhaps I might learn something. Would you mind?"

Krylov frowned, lowered his eyes slightly.

"Is there time?"

"There is an hour."

Krylov thought for a long moment. Then he straightened, smiling.

"Of course. You will go. We will both go."

DIIVILEV stepped out onto the surface of the moonlet. That Krylov was with him did not

matter. He had set foot on an alien world.

He stood upon metal, gazing with wide shining eyes at the crags and the cracks, the dark jagged peaks of the thing out of space. This was something of which, in his life, he had never dreamed. Now that he had done this his life was complete. He moved forward carefully down a ragged cleft, turning to speak to Krylov . . .

. . . who was not there.

"Krylov!"

Emptiness.

He turned and ran back, beginning to understand. In the lack of gravity he almost threw himself out into space, caught hold of a spur and pulled himself down.

"Krylov!"

He sat down. There was no need to call again. He lifted his head and looked once again through the glass of his helmet at the clean, brilliant stars.

"Idiot."

It was Krylov's voice, flat and dispassionate, coming through the radio in his helmet. Diavilev shuddered.

"Did you think we trusted you? Did you think that we did not know-your kind can never be trusted? Did you think you could fool us?"

Diavilev did not answer.

"I will not ask why," Krylov said flatly, "that is known only to your miserable self." He waited. When Diavilev did not speak his voice came again quickly.

"Have you nothing to say, idiot? No epitaph, no begging?"

His voice had become too loud and Diavilev turned the radio down.

"A German checked your figures, Diavilev. Do you understand? A German who is now dead found you out, fool. Your trajectory was radioed to Earth and checked and corrected, and the meteor will not fall in the ocean, Diavilev. It will land on the capitol of the United States!

"And you will be on it. All the way down you will be on it. Is that not a fitting end? We are a great people, Diavilev, a poetic and powerful people. Is your ending not poetic? . . ."

Diavilev rose wearily and clambered up the iron walls to a higher place, a place from which he could see the sun. Krylov was beginning to rave, working himself into a frenzy. Diavilev turned him off, waited patiently in the black silence.

There was nothing heroic about him. If he had it to do now he would not do it at all, but it was fixed and irrevocable and now he would have to wait, afraid and

unutterably lonely, until the end.

The stars above him were a billion icy eyes.

After a while there was a flash, and the moonlet kicked under his feet.

He held on as the metal rocked. He waited, waited, waited, until he could feel it beginning to fall. Then he took a deep breath and spoke:

"Krylov."

"Goodbye."

"Krylov," Diavilev said quietly, "listen, my army friend. You gave me a problem. The problem had two parts. Two parts, army man. And if the first part is wrong the other does not matter."

At the other end of the radio, borne through space and the rushing emptiness, Diavilev sensed the beginning of fear. He was able to smile.

"What? . . ." came faintly.

"When you checked the trajectory, did you also bring some German up to compute the size of the moonlet all over again?"

Nothing. Diavilev chuckled.

"You didn't, did you, Krylov?"

There was nothing on the radio but an aching, brittle static.

"You used the speed *I* gave you; you used the mass *I* gave you. The moon will not fall on America, Krylov."

Gradually now, over the weak-

ening radio, came back the sounds which were to be the last pleasure of Pyotr Diavilev's life. Rage first, and a vast incoherence, and then Krylov began to change in an ugly, despairing, dirty way, whimpering, and all Diavilev could understand was: ". . . my idea, it was my idea!"

But now Diavilev could not listen, because the moon was falling and there was very little time. An end in fire, the little man thought, a blessed quick end as I hit the air. He shouted, trying to make himself heard.

"We are both dying, army man.

Soldier boy, my captain, *do you know where the moon will fall?*"

Krylov knew. He went mad.

"Watch me go!" and now Diavilev was laughing, "take your seat of honor and watch me all the way. Here I go, Krylov, watch me! Watch your world!"

He stopped, out of breath, to hang on, while the moon fell away beneath him, faster, faster, and the stars began to whirl, and a poetic end, he thought, a lovely end, let there be an end. And eventually the end came and Diavilev was dust, and his dust mingled evenly with the fire-blasted soil of Russia.



Jerry watched from his gun post as the city vanished in a cloud of atomic smoke. His thoughts were of his wife and son, but duty demanded that—

A Soldier's Home Is Battle

By

Lowell Stone

BY the time the radar signal caught their eye it was too late to do anything. Planes traveling faster than sound were already inside the defense zone of the city.

Private First Class Jerry Conlon glanced from the radar screen to the other five members of his Atomic Gun Post team on the outer perimeter of the city. The look in their eyes was one of dazed alarm. Automatically he joined them in zipping shut radiation suits, and then they went for the gun controls, knowing it was too late.

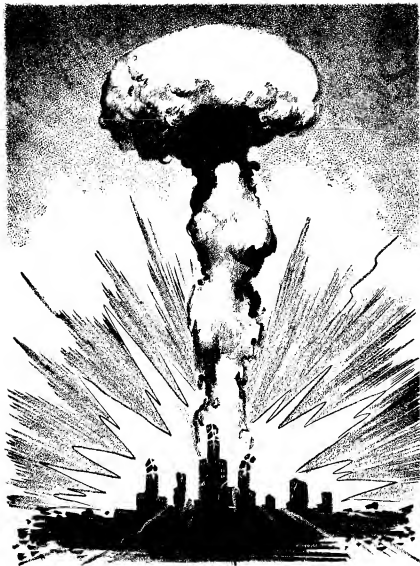
A flash of intolerable brightness faded out the sun. One of the boys—Conlon saw him still struggling with his radiation suit—didn't make it in time. He paid for his slowness with his life.

In that instant of death before his eyes, Jerry thought of his wife

and baby son. It was all he had time for. Just the image in his mind. An image of fear, because he wondered about them—were they dying even now?

With the great flash Jerry dropped into the prone position that he'd been taught. He was protected because the Gun Post had been holed into the ground and reinforced with steel-mesh concrete all around. If you see the flash, it's too late, he'd been told. Well, he'd seen the flash all right. When he dropped to the concrete base, the floor rose to meet him halfway. A few seconds later, the suction raised him off the floor and set him down next to the big gun.

Jerry crawled back to the protection of the bulwark. He had a hazy glimpse of movement around him, but he couldn't see well enough out of his blinded eyes to make out what the others were do-



ing. Things were beginning to rain down out of the sky now, and it continued to rain for what seemed to Jerry like five or ten minutes. It was fantastic how high some of the debris must have been blasted into the air, and he was afraid to move for a long time lest a rock or bit of metal should suddenly streak down.

It was mostly just the smaller pieces that got as far as the Post. The biggest chunks had either been completely disintegrated or splattered along the ground in all directions from the target area. It had been a direct hit. It only took one blast, but that didn't mean it was the only one in the country. When the attack came, every big city had probably been marked for destruction.

Every big city! The thought struck him with sickening force. His wife and little boy—Mildred and Billy! How about them? Had the blasts gone inland?

"Conlon, are you all right?"

The sound of the voice stabbed at Jerry. He studied the wavering dark form in front of his eyes, and recognition of the voice came slowly. The white blob of the face must belong to Lieutenant Blake. Ordinarily Jerry would have snapped to attention and saluted, but at the moment the formality seemed ridiculous.

"I guess I'm all right, sir."

"Good!" That was all Blake said as he passed from Jerry's view.

IN Jerry's earphones it sounded like a strong wind was blowing. It could be the roar of a fleet of rocket planes. Was this the follow-up attack? Why wasn't the order given to man the gun? He groped forward and sprawled over a pile of debris. Where was everybody? Where was Blake? He called out.

"Take it easy, Conlon," a voice said beside him.

"Who—who is it?" Jerry asked, trying to determine the source of the voice.

"It's me — Adam Peterman. You'll be all right after awhile. What'd you do — look into the flash?"

"I saw the flash. Good God! Am I going blind?"

"I once looked at a test blast with a radiation suit on. They still haven't perfected these lenses to shut out all the glare. You'll be like that for a couple of hours." "How many of the boys did the blast get?"

Here he was, Jerry thought, asking about the six men in the gun crew when there must have been thousands—maybe millions—dead in the city, or what must be left of it.

"There's just three of us alive so far," Peterman said. "The Lieu-

tenant found Kroger, but he'd been crushed. The rest are either buried or blown away."

"How about you? I still can't see where you are," Jerry said. "Are you hurt?"

"My legs got messed up. I'm sitting on the ground. That's why you can't see me."

"What about the city? What's left of it?"

"From where I'm sitting I should be able to see the tops of some of the taller buildings over the concrete, but there's nothing there. I hate to think about it."

"If there is anything left, the rocket planes will bring 'em down."

"What rocket planes?"

"Can't you hear 'em? That roar in the air. It almost drowns out the geiger meter on my suit."

"Naw, Conlon, that isn't what you think! You're still hearing the sound of the blast."

"After this long?"

"It doesn't die out for a long time."

Jerry thought about Mildred and Billy. It was this bad even in a radiation suit with special lenses to protect the eyes; special braces to minimize the shock wave effects; special material perfected during the latter part of the century to deflect ultra-radiation. How would Mildred and Billy fare back home where they were unprotected? They might even be dead. But no!

They couldn't be! They were all he had left in life. They just had to be alive!

The shadowy blob which was Lieutenant Blake, moved into Jerry's line of vision. Blake's form seemed to be getting smaller now; the haziness around the edges seemed to be dwindling.

"How are you Peterman?" Blake asked the man with the wounded legs.

"I'll make it all right, Lieutenant. I might even be able to sight the gun if you lift me into the seat."

"Good man, Peterman!" Blake turned to Jerry, "Well, Conlon, it looks like you and I are the only ones on our feet. That means we've got work to do."

"My eyes are bad, but I think they're clearing up now," Jerry said.

"Things are pretty rough," Blake said. "From what I've been able to determine, the whole nation's been blasted."

"Lieutenant—no!" Jerry cried. He moved forward toward the Lieutenant and clutched Blake by the shoulders. "I've got a wife and kid back home!"

"We all have relatives back home, Conlon. You're no different than anybody else. And it's just as bad for us as it is for you. You've got to get a grip on yourself. There's nothing you can do

for them one way or the other."

"The hell there isn't! I'm going back to 'em!"

The Lieutenant's covered hand whipped out and slapped the front of Jerry's helmet below the vision lens. Jerry went backwards and dropped to the concrete floor.

"Sorry, Conlon," Blake clipped. "I didn't do that in anger. I merely wanted to snap you back to your senses! You're still in the Army, and I'm still your commanding officer. As far as the Army is concerned, none of us have any relatives."

Jerry got to his feet. There was no question that the Lieutenant was right. The Army was the big boss, and soldiers were not supposed to have personal feelings. There were several million soldiers protecting many millions of people and the only way that Mildred and Billy could be protected was through the combined and strategic effort of these soldiers. There were soldiers in the interior risking their lives to protect people like Mildred and Billy—soldiers with relatives in the city that Jerry was supposed to protect. It would be a sorry plight if, at the first sign of trouble, all the men would run home to their own little families.

It all seemed like a crazy nightmare to Jerry. No matter how big the catastrophe, human beings still worried about the little problems

along with the big. It was a strange feeling to look over the top of the bulwark and see nothing but the dirty gray sky where the forms of big buildings should be. The shock was less horrible to him because by the time his sight returned, he was accepting the awful scene of destruction as an unchangeable fact.

IT was several hours later before a small contingent of radiation clothed soldiers arrived in several jeeps. A Colonel of the Army stepped out. Blake and Conlon stood at attention as the officers introduced themselves. The Colonel's name was Harrison.

"I'm trying to find out what we have to work with. Not much, I'm afraid," the Colonel said. "The Government's gone. Communication is disrupted."

"Did you say there was no more government, Colonel?" Jerry asked.

The Colonel nodded. "That's what I said."

"Then there's no hope—nothing left to fight for any more?"

"Nothing to fight for?" the Colonel snorted. "Soldier, as long as we have our hills and valleys we'll have something to fight for!"

Lieutenant Blake said, "Private Conlon, no more of that defeatist talk! Please excuse him, Colonel."

"That's all right," the Colonel shrugged. "It's been a shock to

all of us. Now, tell me, how are you fixed?"

"Two able, counting myself. One bad casualty. One dead. Three missing," Blake said.

"You'll have one man replacement."

"But, Colonel, that isn't enough to man the gun!"

"Apparently you don't realize what's happened to the country, Lieutenant! We're not attempting to hold back the enemy. When they come they're going to flow right over us as though we aren't here."

"Then what's the point of—"

"The point is this. We have not received an order to surrender. We probably never will."

Blake said, "We'll do the best we can, Colonel."

The Colonel gave an order and one man crawled out of a jeep and strode toward them. The soldier saluted.

"He is your replacement, Lieutenant," the Colonel said. Then he shook hands with Blake. "Good-bye, and good luck!"

The jeeps growled into life. It was strange hearing them, Jerry thought. Usually there was the hum of the city in the background, a sort of whispering that made you realize a throbbing community was nearby. Now it was only the silence broken by the raucous sound of jeep motors. Eventually even

this sound disappeared.

"All right, men, start clearing up this mess," Blake snapped. "The gun has to have free traverse. After that, stay at your posts. It's going to be tough to handle this assignment short-handed, and when the secondary attack comes it's going to roll in like a tidal wave."

The replacement was hardly more than a kid. Jerry thought he looked as though he could be pushed over with a heavy breath. Not much of a replacement, but he pitched into work earnestly.

Jerry edged close to Peterman as he worked. The wounded man sat propped against a pile with his legs stretched out uselessly in front.

"They didn't even offer to give you medical aid, Peterman," Jerry said.

"I didn't expect it at a time like this," Peterman said. "The men that are left have their hands full."

"For what? You heard what the Colonel said, the Government is gone—possibly the whole country! What we're doing isn't even a delaying action. We're hardly going to harass the Enemy! What's the good of hanging on? Why doesn't the Army turn us loose? I've got to find out how my wife and kid are doing! Staying here only means one thing—one foolish, stupid thing!"

"You've got a point, Conlon," Peterman said through his pain. "I've got a family too. I'd be tempted to take off myself, if I had legs."

"Duty! Allegiance! What does it all mean now?" Jerry said bitterly.

"Not much I suppose, when they pull the curtain in front of you."

JERRY was breathing hard inside his radiation suit. "Peterman, I've got a notion to make a break!"

"That decision you've got to make yourself, Conlon. Only remember, that leaving your post gives the Lieutenant the right to shoot you in the back!"

"I'll take that chance. I've got to see Mildred and Billy. You think you'd do the same thing, Peterman, if you had legs? Would you?"

"I might. I don't know. I'm in no position to give it much thought."

"But don't you think this is stupid to wait for certain death when there's no hope—when I've got the chance to see the ones I love, maybe for the last time?"

"It's stupid all right I guess."

"You've got loved ones, haven't you, Peterman? You know how much it means?" Peterman clammed and refused to talk.

Jerry went to the storage which

was built into the side of the concrete wall, opened the door, and brought out his rifle. He examined the automatic weapon and found it undamaged. He looked around. Lieutenant Blake was out of sight inside the dugout where he was still trying to pick up messages. The replacement was mechanically heaving debris away from the traverse frame of the big gun.

"Conlon." It was Peterman calling.

"What do you want?"

"There's only one thing I'd like you to do before you leave. You and the replacement lift me to the gunner's seat, will you? I have a bad dose of radiation on top of everything else. I don't know how long I can hold out, but I might as well be doing some good for the time I have left."

Jerry put the rifle down, called to the replacement. Together they hoisted Peterman into the seat. Lieutenant Blake came out just as they finished the job.

"That's what he wanted, sir," Jerry said. "You're so short-handed we didn't think you'd object."

Blake said, "Peterman, you should be keeping yourself quiet."

Peterman failed to answer for a long moment. Finally he said, "Damn the Enemy! Why don't they hurry up and get it over with?"

Jerry walked over to where he had stacked his automatic rifle. He swung it under his arm and turned to face the Lieutenant.

"I'm leaving, sir. Don't try to stop me! What we're doing here is plain stupid. I've got a wife and kid that I've got to see before I die! I'm leaving, and I'll shoot to kill if anybody tries to stop me! Got that, Lieutenant?"

"I'm not going to stop you, Conlon," Blake said quietly.

"I hope the rest of you can manage the gun while I'm gone!" Jerry cried.

"We'll manage all right until you get back."

A faint far-away roar sounded in Jerry's earphones. The sound became rapidly louder. "No sense in me coming back, Lieutenant, because from the sound of things, you won't be around much longer."

Jerry backed toward the concrete steps that would take him to ground level. He climbed up, kicking away litter so that he would have places for his feet. He kept the rifle pointed at the motionless, watching men. The roar became louder.

Lieutenant Blake called up to him. "You're from the inland area, aren't you, Conlon? I think the chances for your family were pretty good. Emergency stations are starting to come through from the interior. The guided missiles

had a lot of near-misses."

Out of the corners of Jerry's eyes he detected a strange looking dark cloud appearing along the horizon. From the west, not the east! That was odd. The dark cloud spread across the horizon, coming closer. Rocket planes! Hundreds of them!

Jerry was at ground level now. Up here there would be no protection. A blast and shock wave could sweep across the flat ground unhindered. The roar became deafening. Now he could recognize the ships. They were Army Comets!

He wanted to leap with joy. His spine tingled with excitement. The cloud was roaring overhead now. The Comets flashed onward, bent on a purpose, a death-dealing, earth-shaking purpose! That's the way the Enemy had wanted it. The Enemy had chosen its weapon, and the Army was on its way to blow the Enemy so sky-high that its own attack on Jerry's homeland would seem insignificant by comparison.

Jerry tossed his rifle over the edge of the bulwark. The thunder overhead snuffed out the clatter of the rifle when it struck the concrete below. Jerry went down the steps holding his hands over his head. It was a full minute before he stumbled back to where he had started. "I changed my mind

about leaving, Lieutenant!" Jerry shouted. He might as well have been trying to shout above the roar of a hurricane.

The Lieutenant waved Jerry's arms down, and Jerry was close enough to detect a smile inside the Lieutenant's helmet. Blake turn-

ed and walked away in the direction of the dugout as though nothing had happened.

Jerry pointed skyward, and the men wagged their heads understandingly.

"Hell," Jerry cried, "this war isn't over yet!"

★ *The Doctors Look At Space* ★

A PERSON not aware of just how radically the modern attitude toward rocketry and space flight has changed, might do well to stroll across the well-kept ground of Randolph Field, Texas. He would pass a series of impressive buildings labeled "USAF School of Aviation Medicine" and not be disconcerted—but he would notice one building identified in small type on the door, type which despite its size would stand out like a neon sign and which might cause him to stare goggle-eyed. For the lettering would read, "*Department of Space Medicine*"!

The actuality of rocket flight is so close and its attainment is so near that even the Air Force recognizes that it is no longer a theoretical problem to be spoken of in vague generalities. This is it. Rocketry is coming, and you'd better be prepared for it, is the general attitude. Find out what happens to people when they encounter the conditions of flying through space in a hermetically sealed coffin(?) exposed to radiations and threatened by meteoric destruction,

their bodies ravaged by accelerations and "free-fall". Find out how to make sure their air for breathing is right. In other words, do research!

The Department of Space Medicine, manned by some of the most eminent medical men and rocketeers in the world is devoted to just that purpose, and from their laboratories are issuing a steady stream of pamphlets and documents concerning these problems, with solutions derived from calculation and experiment.

Their conclusions are optimistic. Men can survive flight in space. This is not as trivial a conclusion as old science fiction readers might think. Space flight is threaded with tough problems and, as adaptable as is the human frame, precious care must be taken of every factor that can possibly affect it.

The "space medicine-men" know this: men can stand the accelerations of rockets taking off. Free-fall, the condition of gravitylessness can also be withstood by the human body though all spacemen will spend a good portion of their

time suffering the pangs of wrenching nausea. Flight in a rocket will be surprisingly like a ride on an endless roller-coaster and the occupants can't look for relief until they land.

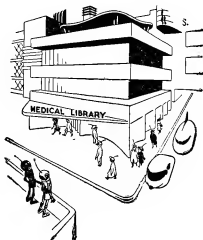
Meteoric danger is trivial. The chances of a rocket being struck by a dangerous meteor are extremely slight and mathematically very doubtful. Of course, should it happen, then blooey!—for rocket and occupants.

Food and air and water are also no problems. Closed cycle systems using plants to supply oxygen and remove carbon dioxide along with water-scavenging methods will take care of these things.

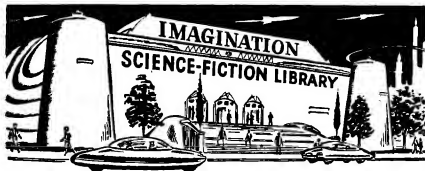
The real unknown, and the one which *really* bothers the medical researchers is the problem of radia-

tion. Cosmic rays are strong and powerful, akin to atomic-plant radiations. Burns, sterility, possibly even death, result from excessive exposure. Metal shielding, unless very thick, is worse than useless for a thin shield produces secondary rays more harmful than the original. The medical men conclude that if cosmic radiation is not too severe, humans will be able to endure it for fairly great lengths of time. On the other hand, if it is very, very strong, space flight will have to wait on the development of a suitable light shield, or failing that—never take place!

But the final consensus of opinion of the medical researchers is that men are going into space and that human footprints will fall on the Moon, Mars and Venus!



"All these books apply to humans—our care and repair is fully covered in a forty-eight page pamphlet . . ."



— REVIEWING CURRENT SCIENCE FICTION BOOKS —

Conducted by Henry Bott & Mark Reinsberg

Hard cover science fiction is booming and many fine novels and anthologies are available at all bookstores or by writing direct to the publishers. Each month IMAGINATION will review several titles — candidly — as a guide to your book purchases.

THE SYNDIC

by C. M. Kornbluth. 223 pages, 2.95. Doubleday & Company, Inc. Garden City, New York.

Divide the United States in two parts, a Syndic-ruled benevolency east of the Mississippi and a Mobster-ruled gangdom west of that line. An exiled North American government seeking by raids and sabotage to regain its power, operating from the remains of England and devastated Europe—this is the background for a fast-moving science fiction piece done with the clever attention to realism and characterization which marks most of Kornbluth's work.

Hedonism is the philosophy of the Syndic; morality is absent, and when the polo-playing hero, Charles Orsino, stumbles into the archaic,

barbaric lair of the North American government, he is transformed into something more than a dilettante.

It is easy to criticize this story. It is not great science fiction, but its speed of movement, its human characters (not puppets!) and its realistic background make it well worth investigating. Imagine a modern government, predicated upon the steam engine, fighting a modern war!

Provide a first-rate writer like Kornbluth with a theme worthy of his power and it would be possible to rave about instead of recommend, his work. "The Syndic" is good, but were it removed in place and time a lot more, it would really be great HB

THE BEST FROM STARTLING STORIES

Compiled by Samuel Mines. 301 pages. 3.50. Henry Holt & Company. New York, New York.

This is the type of anthologizing which makes you wonder why the editors went through all the trouble. With the exception of three items, most of the stories are sad, tired, trite things, better left buried where they originated. This harsh judgment is corroborated by the few qualified pieces of writing which appear. So rather than malign the anthology further, let's consider the good things.

First, there is an introduction by Robert Heinlein. It is one of those broad essays which he does so well, have nothing to do with the contents of the book, and extremely entertaining because of it. It pithily discusses the role of fantasy in science fiction; its flaw is that it is too brief, and too vague—with all

that other space!

Theodore Sturgeon's "The Wages of Synergy" is poor Sturgeon, but good writing as measured by the book. The poetic flavor of Sturgeon's word-using can't even be marred by his predilection for the *avant-garde*. It's Sturgeon's typical sex-problem motivated man—all psychology and characterization, with the s-f spread thinly. A trend too prevalent these days.

The only other noteworthy tale is Arthur Clarke's "Thirty Seconds—Thirty Days." Problem: men aboard a Venus bound—ship—oxygen running too low for all. Question; how do men behave in this circumstance? In anyone else's hands, this tired situation would leave you utterly cold beyond the first page but Clarke writes his inevitably gripping story, with its credible background. . . . HB

CHILDHOOD'S END

by Arthur C. Clarke. 217 pages, \$2.00—paperbound, 35c. Ballantine New York.

Slower in build-up than *Sands of Mars*, Mr. Clarke's excellent first novel, but utterly staggering in conclusion, the central concept of this book can be stated as follows.

The destiny of the human race is to become something *else*, something higher, ethereal—a cerebral gyroscopic force, self-projecting, space-warping. This metamorphosis will lift mankind to the realm of the gods, masters of the galaxy, but will destroy the earth and all

physical traces of man himself.

This "inevitable" development of the Twenty-Second Century is boldly conceived and vividly, almost terrifyingly, described—with a climax as sonorous as Judgment Day.

In form, however, *Childhood's End* is sprawling and dismembered in telling (there are no central human characters lasting from one main section to the next). And this reader was left despondent rather than exhilarated by the morbid, metaphysical outcome.

Recommended but far from a masterpiece. . . . MR



Conducted by Mari Wolf

SCIENCE fiction fans, it goes without saying, like to read. Or at least they like to read science fiction. There are lots of people who never read stf, or anything else except maybe the newspapers, but who still like science fiction as they find it in the movies, on TV, radio, or in the comics. I don't think anyone would class these people as fans, though. (I know; you could go farther and assert that ninety per cent of what they see isn't science fiction, either, but that would be hardly true. You may not like some of the grade Z productions; you may shudder at what's billed at the Drive-in movies as stf, and yet you'll have to admit that it is stf. Science fiction isn't always good!)

Lots of people who read science fiction aren't fans. Lots of fans pride themselves on reading very little current stf, except other

fans' fanzines. But did you ever know a science fiction fan who didn't read science fiction? I never did . . .

Many fans, however, soon find that merely reading becomes secondary. They want to own science fiction magazines and books. They want to have a complete collection, not only all the so-called classics but every issue of their favorite magazine and maybe every issue of every science fiction magazine. With them, collecting soon can outstrip their ability to read what they're so busy accumulating.

I admit that I really don't understand collectors, or the desire to collect. The end result of years and years of a fan's hobbying may be very impressive though. I've seen quite a few collections, including the really ambitious ones that aim toward having copies of every book or magazine ever print-

ed that contains science fiction material. It can't be done? Maybe not, but you should see what can be done!

I don't know who owns the largest stf collection of all. I know that Darrell C. Richardson of Covington, Kentucky, has a very complete one, including many foreign editions of Edgar Rice Burroughs. Also, Darrel Richardson has a vast Max Brand collection.

But it wouldn't be surprising if the honor of being the number one collector of all things science fictional went to long-time top name Los Angeles fan Forrest J. Ackerman. His collection has to be seen to be appreciated, and seeing it was, at least a while ago, a real project in itself. Before Forry moved into his present home he lived in an apartment. The apartment was filled with his collection. Row and rows of bookcases, stacks and stacks of magazines, and fantasy art pictures that covered practically every square inch of wall space. You could walk into that apartment and be almost overwhelmed with science fiction: bright dust jackets and gaudy magazine covers and from every wall the brooding eyes of a vampire, mad scientist, or Martian something or other.

Then Forry would say, "How would you like to see my collection sometime?" and you'd realize that no one apartment could possibly hold what he had managed to accumulate.

At one time Forry had three rented garages full of science fiction. It took days just to sort and catalogue what he had. I don't know where he now keeps the overflow

from his house; I'm quite sure that a mansion would be hard put containing a complete file of the world's science fiction. For one thing, a complete collection grows all the time, and the more popular the field becomes with the general public, (the more magazines that enter it, the more books that are published in it) the faster the collection keeps growing.

Most fans, though, specialize in their collecting. It may be issues of a particular magazine, or of a particular year, or of the complete works of a favorite writer. A lot of fans collect fanzines. Quite often a fan who is a bibliographer at heart will spend months and years on cross indexing all the amateur or professional stf publications as to writer, subject matter, places where reprinted and anthologized.

Alas, I don't quite understand the collecting instinct, but those who do seem to have so much fun accumulating things. Especially when they're science fiction fans.

To be a science fiction fan (or at least to become one in the first place) it stands to reason that you read stf. You may not collect it; you may not even buy very many books, but you read it. Usually, if you're a true fannish person, you do a lot of reading in other subjects too.

If you attend a science fiction club you're likely to hear all sorts of concepts flung casually from member to member. Some of these are the fictional concepts of the magazine stories, but a lot of them aren't. You'll find it a quite common practice in a science fiction club to talk about everything except science fiction. Fans are prone to know a little about a lot of

things. You may hear the discussion go from general semantics to anthropology to n -dimensional geometry all in the space of a few minutes, and it's probable that no one in the group is a real expert in any of the fields discussed. But you'll find that almost everyone can enter into the discussion without being too far over his head; it's as if everyone had taken a group of courses like physics for the non-specialist, a general introduction to sociology, or theory of numbers simplified. In a fan club you're likely to find dozens of intelligent amateurs, all of them fairly up to date in the generalities of a half dozen fields, and yet perhaps not one of them with any really advanced scientific or technical training.

IN this age of specialization the fan outlook is often laughed at. But why? Haven't you known too many people who buried themselves too deeply in one specialty and never tried to relate that specialty to life as a whole?

For that matter, a scientist or a technician can certainly be a science fiction enthusiast too, and an intelligent amateur in other fields of knowledge than his own . . .

Science fiction fans read. Some collect. Some write heated letters to the editors. Some edit fanzines. Some become very well known in the group known as fandom, whereas others perhaps never contact more than half a dozen other people with similar interests and live so far outside the realm of general fandom that a purist would say they're not fans at all.

But the one distinguishing mark of the true fan, to my mind at least,

is the fact that he likes to read science fiction. Science, in its different branches. Maybe Elizabethan literature or Pogo or old folk ballads.

Few fans have wallets large enough to indulge their reading tastes. Fans buy books and magazines; they borrow them; they trade them. Fans have friends who work in bookstores and drop in to visit these friends and catch up on their reading. Some fans even work in bookstores themselves and thus can indulge the most freely of all.

Bookstores are wonderful places for science fiction fans. Especially if they're bookstores with sections for second hand books, back issues of magazines, and maybe back rooms filled with all sorts of more or less salable publications. A bookstore that features only new material is, on the other hand, a rather soul-less place; it has no welcome mat out for the fan. You can't very well pick up a brand new book off the shelf and spend the day standing in the aisle reading it. Or at least I can't.

But a bookstore like Vallentine's in Glendale, California, is another matter indeed. There's probably one in your neighborhood—a store with all the new books and shelves of everything from the eighteenth century on, all there waiting to be explored. And Vallentine's is especially fine for the fan. It has regular science fiction days—times when science fiction readers can get together and talk and browse and have coffee and doughnuts in the back room.

Out on display for the stf evening the other day were stacks of magazines from the earlier days of

the field. They were undoubtedly the remnants of fans' collections, turned over to the store to be sold because the collector, for one reason or another, had to dispose of them. Quite a few were real old timers, the magazines from the thirties. But I got the most fun out of browsing through those from the era when I first discovered stf. It seemed odd, finding a story that grew suddenly familiar as I read it and realizing that I'd read it before, eight or ten years ago. It seemed even odder to find how familiar the writer's name is to me now; it meant nothing to me then.

Roy Squires of the Science Fiction Advertiser was host for the evening. Morris Scott Dollens, whose covers for the SFA are always so exceptional, dropped in, and so did a great many of the old time Los Angeles area fans. I don't know if anyone bought anything; probably the evening wasn't at all directly profitable to Mr. Vallentine, but there are doubtless a lot of science fiction readers and buyers who'll now think of Vallentine's as *their* bookstore.

It gives you an odd feeling though. In the back room there were so many old books, leather bound and not at all valuable, from the Victorian era and even earlier. I was glancing through some of them. They're not the classics; they're not the books that ever stood any chance of being remembered. A lot of them consist of advice to young folk, or tender tales of romantic love, or highly uplifting books on a pedestal-like moral plane. They seem so old-fashioned now, so completely foreign to the reading tastes of the mid-twentieth

century.

I wonder if science fiction will ever seem so old-fashioned? It probably will; already some of the older stf does. But for a long time to come there will be new science fiction, and new fans and old to read it and collect it and have a wonderful time discussing all the possible tomorrows.

* * *

Now to the fanzines.

SKYHOOK: 15c; quarterly; Redd Boggs, 2215 Benjamin St. N.E., Minneapolis 18, Minn. This fanzine is distributed normally through the mailings of the FAPA, or Fantasy Amateur Press Association. However, Editor Boggs does sell copies to non-FAPA members, a fortunate circumstance for fans who like serious discussion of science fiction themes and stories.

Skyhook is now in its sixth year of publication. It's a fine, literate publication of interest to everyone who likes the background material of stf. In this issue, for example, Ted Sturgeon discusses his own writing in the article, "Why So Much Syzygy?" Phil Rasch, in "The Mystery of Noah's Ark," traces the legend of the flood and the ark back through the Gilgamesh legend and the days of the Sumerians before that, as well as the archeological evidence of a flood in the Tigris-Euphrates Valley around 4000 B.C. Then there's Redd Boggs' own editorial-article, about all sorts of things both science fictional and not, which I'm sure you'd enjoy.

Well worth your 15c.

* * *

IT: 15c; published irregularly; Walter W. Lee, Jr., 1205 S. 10th.

St., Coos Bay, Oregon. Lee and co-editor Robert W. Chambers put out this unusual fanzine that features reviews on subjects that aren't of the straight stf variety. Still, what stf fan doesn't like Pogo, or UPA's Mr. Magoo?

In IT, you'll find a long section on "Production Notes from United Productions of America," courtesy of Mr. Charles Daggett and Miss Rita Cummings of UPA. Here you will find previews and reviews of subjects like "The Tell Tale Heart"—with pictures from the Poe film. Also, you'll find the UPA version of Thurber's "Unicorn in the Garden," as well as "The Emperor's New Clothes," and "Christopher Crumpet" (which I happened to see the evening I read the IT review on it. Don't miss it . . .)

Walt Lee writes on "Satire in Pogo," a rather brief bibliography of the personalities of the Okefenokee Swamp. And there are reviews of other movies and stf books.

* * *

PSYCHOTIC: 10c; monthly; Richard E. Geis, 2631 N. Mississippi, Portland 12, Oregon. I hope this one stays around a long, long time. It's worth getting just for Geis' covers, which look so simple to do but probably aren't because so many fanzines that attempt a similar style come out botched. Too, it's worth getting just to read Geis' editorials, "The Leather Couch, where the editor rambles on . . . and on . . . and on." Like that editorial in his first issue, where he listed themes for off-trail stf stories that probably would be too off-trail to print anywhere except in fanzines . . .

The issue I have here contains

columns by Bob Stewart and Shelby Vick, complete with his puffin-critters. There's an article by Francis Bordna, "The Forgotten Man of Fantasy," about old-time weird and fantasy writer Hiram G. Brentwood. The two stories are well written fan stories. William Freeman's "The Wanderers" paints a mood in just a few paragraphs, and Delroy Lewis' "Satisfied Customer," an entertaining story, is fun to read though a little too predictable.

Are you feeling dull and normal lately? Try Psychotic . . .

* * *

SOL: 10c; published irregularly; Dave Ish, 914 Hammond Road, Ridgewood, New Jersey. In the columns and articles of this mimeoed fanzine you'll find a cross section of "fannish" writing. There's Harlan Ellison's article on amateur artists for example. "The Fan Artist: Scribbler in Disguise?" discusses the techniques of the better known practitioners in the field, sometimes approvingly and sometimes caustically. Charles Dye, in his "Wish I'd Written That!" tells about a favorite fantasy yarn that once appeared in Mammoth Detective. From his description of the story I can't figure out why he would have wanted to write it, but it may have sounded better, and less involved, in the original.

And Ed Wood, in "Fandom, Grow Up or Get Lost!" paints one fan's opinion of the present and future of amateur stf.

* * *

ASFO: 15c; Jerry Burge, 415 Pavillion St., S.E., Atlanta, Ga. ASFO is the unofficial organ of the Atlanta Science Fiction Organization.

It contains good articles, columns, and fiction. I'm glad that Editor Burge decided to keep fiction in the zine, as long as it's good fiction.

In this copy there's Fred Chapell's story, "The Tonal Analyzer," about the effect of an invention that sorts out notes so slightly off pitch that the human ear couldn't tell they were out of tune. It's a well written story, real science fiction, which is something that so many fan stories aren't.

William Batterson, in "Thoughts on Fantasy," deals with the non-acceptance of fantasy by people oriented too much toward the realistic approach, and also with the writing styles and conventions of the fantasy field itself. But why, granted that Victorian era prose with its involved sentences and difficult words has gone out of style, why does that prove English is a young language? Just because it's still changing?

It's an interesting article. But then, just about everything in ASFO is.

* * *

PERHAPS: Fans in the United States can obtain this Australian fanzine for 25c from Charles Anderson, 311 East Polk St., Phoenix, Arizona. It's a good amateur science fiction and fantasy magazine published by Leo J. Harding, 510 Drummond St., Carlton, N3, Victoria, Australia, and if you're Down Under you can get a copy from Editor Drummond for 2/6.

In the current issue the British *Authentic's* editor H. J. Campbell gives his definition of science fiction, as distinguished from fantasy and other forms of literature. There's a last man on Earth story

by Rick Jordan called "Homecoming," and a couple of other stories that are good but not up to the quality of the non-fiction published. Perhaps the best thing in the magazine is Roger Dard's article on "Witch Hunters of the Atomic Age," about censorship, book-banning and the democratic way . . .

* * *

ANDROMEDA: quarterly: Pete Campbell, 60 Calgarth Road, Windermere, West., England. If you'd like to sample this British fanzine but are an American reader, just send editor Campbell a copy of MADGE or another 35c professional stf magazine and you'll get a copy of Andromeda in return.

This is a fannish fanzine, in that it deals much more with fan activities and personalities than with serious stf. For a report on British fan life, the London Convention and other get-togethers, and for becoming acquainted with British fans, you'll find this one very interesting.

I preferred the articles to the stories. George Wetzel's "The Supernatural Horror Tale" was a good accounting of the types of weird stories, and John Gutteridge makes a plea for more science in stf in "It's Up to You."

* * *

FILLER: 25c; Art Wesley, 402 Maple Ave., Fond du Lac, Wisconsin. Art Wesley and Norman Browne have come up with the joke book of science fiction fandom—an entire fanzine full of jokes, humorous verse, and gag lines of one sort or another. The jokes are numbered, running through 527 items and 40 pages. Source is given for most of the Filler material, but

is it always the original source? There seems to be quite a bit of Victor Borge in here credited to other people . . .

Ah well, Borge probably isn't a fan, anyway.

It's quite a compilation, one that you'll get a kick out of. I bet the editors had fun assembling it.

* * *

STF TRENDS: 25c; Lynn A. Hickman, Box 184, Napoleon, Ohio. Here's a fine photo-offset fanzine where you'll find unusual covers and artwork and some very good stories and articles of varied types. Apparently it intends to keep on getting better and better, too, from what has been forecast for future issues.

The copy I have here features an article reprinted from *Nation's Business*. It's Stanley Franks' "Out of this World," and the topic, as you may have guessed, is science fiction. The article discusses material that's familiar to most fans, but certainly not to the general readership of its original publication.

Then there's another installment of Harlan Ellison's fan fiction serial, "The Long Episode," about the voyaging of the fan space ships. This is the type of thing that's really funny if you know the people involved, but somewhat pointless if you don't.

There's an extensive letter column, other articles, and good interior illustrations. It's a good zine, well put out; the only fault you might find is to wish that it were bigger.

* * *

PEON: 10c; bimonthly; Charles Lee Riddle, 108 Dunham St., Nor-

wich, Conn. This is a well traveled fanzine. It accompanies Editor Riddle everywhere. For a long time it originated from Hawaii, but for more than a year now it's been stateside.

In the copy I have here there's James White's story, "Blood Will Tell," another invasion of Earth theme. Among the articles, T. E. Watkins' "Kan Kan Kabitzer" covers a lot of weird subjects, giving tidbits of news you may not have heard of on all sorts of things, from flying saucers to devil worship. The weird in a light vein . . .

Always an entertaining zine, Peon.

* * *

SPACE TIMES: monthly; Eric Bentcliffe, 47, Alldis St., Gt. Moor, Stockport, Cheshire, England. Editors Bentcliffe and Eric Jones don't have an American price listed for this one, but they'd probably be glad to accept copies of American pro magazines in exchange.

Like so many British fanzines, Space Times features very good writing in its fiction department. The copy I have here contains six stories, all readable, ranging from serious to a satire on Fu Manchu entitled "The Coated Tong," by Terry Jeeves. Editor Bentcliffe's "At the Rise of the Moon" tells of a werewolf's struggles to escape from changing into the monster, Man, while Pat and Bernard Lee explore the Adam and Eve theme once again in "Genesis."

It's a mimeoed fanzine with articles and a book review section in addition to the fiction. I'm sure you'll like it.

* * *

FAN WARP: 20c; Lyle Kessler,

2450-76 Ave., Philadelphia 38, Pennsylvania. Here's a brand-new fanzine from the '53 Convention city. It's a mimeoed fanzine, well balanced, with features, articles and fiction, legible mimeography, and a well drawn impressionistic cover by Sol Levin.

The inimitable Robert Bloch writes on "How to Attend a Science Fiction Convention," or "The Manly Art of Self Defense," showing with both words and pictures how one defends oneself at such an affair. (The pictures are Levin's. The words are Bloch's.) Now if only some young fan would take it seriously, we'd have a riot . . .

* * *

ECLIPSE: 10c; Ray Thompson, 410 South 4th. St., Norfolk, Neb. In this hectographed zine you'll meet a lot of fans and have a lot of fannish fun. Eclipse isn't serious; you won't settle the affairs of the twenty-first century here, or even the twentieth. But you'll see covers like the soap covered skunk giving a testimonial for a certain deodorizing soap, and Joel Nydahl's column "Inertia, the column that keeps moving right along . . ."

* * *

FANTASY-TIMES: 10c; published twice a month; James V. Taurasi, 137-03 32nd. Ave., Flushing 54, N. Y. If you've never seen a copy of science fiction's newspaper you have really missed something. Not that F-T is at all imposing to look upon. It's a rather slim mimeoed zine that merely tells you everything of interest in the science fiction world. Its correspondents keep you posted on the publishing cen-

ters of New York and Chicago, the TV studios, Hollywood, and foreign markets as well. You'll learn about conventions and personalities, fans and professionals, new magazines and changes in old ones.

You'll get a lead on movies you might enjoy, and books you shouldn't miss. No matter what your special interests in the stf world, you'll find news of it here, in the science fiction newspaper.

* * *

INTRODUCTION TO PROJECT FAN CLUB: 15c, or a sample free; Orville W. Mosher, 1728 Mayfair, Emporia, Kansas. For any of you who have been following Mosher and Company's attempts to coordinate everything known about the founding and maintenance of fan clubs into one booklet that will be of help to fans and groups of fans everywhere, this will bring you up to date on the project. Material for the PFC booklet is just about all collected; the booklet itself should be out soon. Mosher is now working on a still more ambitious project, the Federated World Fanclubs, and if you're at all interested in this international organization just write to him. He'll be more than willing to let you know all about it.

* * *

That's all the fanzines there's room to cover this time. Next month there'll be more. Just remember, if you have a fanzine you want reviewed, send it to me, Mari Wolf, *Fandora's Box*, IMAGINATION,, P. O. Box 230, Evanston, Ill. See you next month.

—Mari Wolf

L etters

from the R eaders

SWORD OF DAMOCLES ...

Dear Mr. Hamling:

Since Madge's letter column is usually, and liberally, larded with complimentary efforts by the readers, I've always felt that one more or less wouldn't make much difference. Particularly from this reader. As a rule IMAGINATION's stories are without cause for serious complaint, as well as the articles—that is, as a rule! This time (the December issue) however, I have a bone to pick with you.

In the article on page 142 regarding the conquest of planets, the author hopes fervently to have the first space station operated by the U. S., as do many other sf writers. Ostensibly the purpose is to insure against war by the threat of atomic guided missiles and other advanced weapons. In other words, a defense measure. But who, may I ask, should be allowed the right to hang such a Sword of Damocles over the heads of the entire planet? Should any one nation or group of nations have the absolute right to decide

what is best for everybody? Of course not!

Such an action would only constitute a threat to the people who it is supposed to frighten into submission. A space station like that could only achieve the purpose of defense if administered by a body such as the United Nations. Let's look at it this way. Should the Soviet Union put up a space station and claim it was only a defensive measure, would we regard it as such? Wouldn't we consider it a thinly concealed threat—a big stick that could be turned against us? Of course we would.

Under a joint administration the likelihood of war would be much farther away than under a one-sided management. It seems so painfully obvious, or perhaps that's just some old battle scars twinging! Anyway, even if we agree at the conference table to disagree, it's still not the battlefield, it's the conference table!

Bruce Sabsay
901 Bloor St., W.
Toronto 4, Ont. Canada

The Space Station—on the way, we hope—will serve a dual purpose; it will certainly be a defense weapon by its very nature, but equally important—more so for man's future—it will be his stepping stone to the planets. But let's forget the latter for the moment.

If the United States develops a space station (hurry up, boys!) your suggestion means that we turn over its secret to the world—which includes the Reds. That's much the same as saying we should have turned over the atomic bomb when we first developed it. You infer that the best way to maintain peace today is to give your enemy the best weapons you have! Considering the enemy's record (and we consider Russia to be an enemy) this would be much the same as putting a loaded pistol to your head and daring someone to step up and pull the trigger. Let's ask you the question: Would you feel safer with an Allied power controlling a space station rather than Russia? For our money Russia should be trusted as far as a blind man can see. Heaven help the world if they plant a man-made satellite upstairs ahead of us! As to the United Nations, that's simply an arbitration board, where differences are argued and theoretically resolved. No, sir, if a space station is to be put in the sky, let the United States put it there; we'd make it a sword of freedom. Better that than a sickle of slavery... with

A FAN NO LONGER . . . ?

Dear Ed:

This letter should be titled "Why

I no longer am an IMAGINATION fan." Please read and heed because there must be many others who feel the same way I do but don't take the time to write and voice their complaints and opinions. The following are my complaints.

1. The stories as a whole are very definitely below par. I would say that this condition has been coming on gradually and really became very noticeable starting with the September issue.

Is this situation due to the fact that there are so many "Johnny come latels" entering the stf field?

2. The fact that a story is written by a "name author" does not guarantee that it is a good story. I am referring in particular to SKY LIFT by Robert Heinlein in the November issue. I thought it was an extremely average to below average story. The plot has been used over and over. Heinlein must have done this one in a few hours. I fail to see why it deserves the raves you gave it or why it rated a cover.

3. I have been reading stories of science fiction and fantasy since way back in the 20's. Now my daughter (a teenager) reads whatever magazines I bring home. I at least want the stories to use proper words and sentences and leave out all lowdown and filthy grammar. We all (and I think the readers will agree) can do without "Hell", "son-of-a-bitch", etc. (Refer to page 51 of the November issue—the story is THE TIME ARMADA.) There is absolutely no need for the author to use such rotten language and you have an obligation not to print it.

Maybe Madge should go back to bi-monthly schedule; perhaps the stories will get better. St. Reynard and Galouye are your two best bets. Also, is it necessary to print new material only? There were some real classics written 10-15-20-25 years ago.

In closing, I hope you will get Madge back to normal. I hope I can remain one of your fans. It's up to you.

W. H. Pierce

19913 Eldora Rd.

Rocky River 16, Ohio

We'll comment on your points in the order you mention them. 1: The stories in Madge are considerably above par in the opinion of most readers. We don't say that every story is a gem, but we do feel that the "duds" are in a distinct minority. Naturally opinions on stories differ, so all we can say is we hope you'll be more satisfied with future issues. Your question as to new magazines making a difference in story quality does have merit. As more magazines appear it becomes difficult to fill each issue of any given magazine with top-notch material; there are only so many "professionally competent" writers, and when the demand begins to exceed the supply then quality suffers. With this condition existing today we feel that Madge is doing a good job in obtaining the best material available. 2: We agree with you that a big name is not always a guarantee of a good story. However, we felt that Heinlein's *SKY LIFT* was a good story, so we bought it. Along these lines we'd like to state as fact that we often reject a story by a

"name" writer simply because it isn't up to snuff. When we read a manuscript we forget the byline on page 1. It's the story that sells us . . . 3: The use of slang and/or cusswords has been discussed before in these pages. We're sure you don't find many of them in Madge; you will find them occasionally, and that's because the writer feels (as we do) that in certain dramatic instances a character would have reacted similarly in real life. And portraying a character in terms of reality is an author's most difficult task. Swearing for the sake of being profane we do not tolerate. But gadzooks, what man (or woman) hasn't let a naughty word slip at some time in his life! As to unfit language for teenagers, we don't believe Madge will corrupt any morals in any way; matter of fact, your editor has three teenage kids and none of them have become delinquent in their use of language from reading an occasional cussword in a Madge story. Understand, we are not upholding profanity in any way, except to say you'll find it cropping up in the best of circles. Ever read the bible? . . . wth

WOW! HE SAYS . . .

Dear Ed:

I have just finished reading the December issue of Madge, and I have this to say, WOW!

The lead story, THE COSMIC JUNKMAN was terrific! Excellent! I have never read anything like it. How about having Rog Phillips do a sequel?

Next in order was FIRST CAPTIVE, very good; BLESSED ARE

THE MEEKBOTS, good; PROJECT, EARTH good too. The whole issue was wonderful. Keep up the good work.

Seems to me there are some writers who go by the name of St. Reynard, Van Vogt, Bradbury, and Asimov. How about something from them.

I'd like to hear from other fans my age—16.

Zack Davies

320 Justice St.

Hendersonville, N. C.

Story by Geoff St. Reynard coming right up! wlh

BEST FOR THE YEAR

Dear Bill:

With the December issue in let's look back over the year's best.

Best novel in my opinion was THE ENCHANTED CRUSADE (April 1953) by Geoff St. Reynard. When I first read it I was not particularly impressed. But after reading it again I changed my view. The story has an indefinable charm. Perhaps the best thing in its favor is the fact that it deviated from the usual science fiction story. It was a very enjoyable change from the usual fare one finds these days.

Best novelette was Daniel F. Galouye's SO SAYS THE MASTER (October 1953).

Best short story, Joel Nydahl's LESSON FOR TODAY (May 1953). I read somewhere that Nydahl was only fourteen when he wrote the story. Is this true? No matter, it was a heck of a good yarn.

Best cover was on the October

issue, a Malcolm Smith photo-cover. I hope to see more of his work in 1954.

While IMAGINATION doesn't publish the *Galaxy* type of story, I can truthfully say that I've enjoyed every Madge story I've read.

Yours for more IMAGINATION.

John Walston

Vashon, Wash.

We can't give you Joel Nydahl's exact age, but we understand he's around fourteen or fifteen. He shows great talent wlh

STF POPULARITY . . .

Dear Mr. Hamling:

About a year and a half ago you published my first letter to a science fiction magazine. This is the second letter I've written. At that time I was what you might call a newcomer to science fiction inasmuch as my reading of it had been confined to Verne and Wells. I don't consider myself an old-timer now, but I have, since that time, read a great deal of stf and fantasy. Most of it good, in my opinion.

In my last letter I stated that science fiction had not become accepted, in the sense that serious writers, critics, and publishing companies seemed to think that the field would last only a short time, or if it did would only be popular with youngsters and a "fanatic" group of adults. Need I say that most of these people have been forced to eat their words?

That the general public has accepted science fiction is seen in the increased number of monthly science fiction and fantasy magazines,

the great number of hard-cover and pocket sized editions of novels and anthologies, and the volume of sales of both magazines and books. Hardly a month goes by that some new magazine is not out on the stands.

It remains to be seen to what one can attribute the popularity of science fiction. In my opinion it has been the publicity of the sf magazines in calling attention to famous scientists as contributors, in predicting events which authorities also predict, and in supplying a great deal of enjoyment simply in the reading of science fiction stories.

In summary, science fiction has become "accepted"; it will continue to provide entertainment and promote speculation among millions of readers.

In the December issue of *Madge*, Jerome Martin writes his opinion about the letters you print from various readers. Your reply to him seemed quite vague. I should think that those people who only "comment periodically" would have more to say than one who writes more often; that instead of comments on stories they could offer constructive criticism. I, like Mr. Martin, do not concern myself with what other readers think of stories. Mainly because I believe no one's science fictional tastes are similar.

Your reference to sales figures as a guide to editorial and publishing policy was an excellent rebuff to Mr. Martin's statement about serials. Why the serial is such an issue with so many readers puzzles me. It seems somewhat childish to become desperate merely because one cannot read an entire story at

one sitting.

Barry Miller of San Francisco writes in the same December issue that *IMAGINATION* is a "well-rounded" magazine, an opinion with which I concur. I think however that Mr. Miller forgets that most of those people who buy science fiction magazines buy more than one. To have a "well-rounded" magazine is very good, but if, for example, I had read only *Madge* for the past several years, I think I would have missed a great deal of good science fiction. *Madge* is different. That is why it is so popular. But to deny that magazines like *Galaxy* and *Astounding* are not equally as good is like saying that chocolate caramels are better than vanilla caramels because they are different!

I trust that relations between *Madge*, which is "super cool" and Miss Ulrich of Ozone Park, N. Y., who is also "super cool" will not become too frigid. "Super cool"—this is constructive criticism?

Robert P. Gagne
5 Kensington St.
Andover, Mass.

We only wish that science fiction was generally "accepted" as you seem to think it is. The fact of the matter is that while there are countless science fiction books and magazines on the market today, the market itself has not actually increased. Indeed, in terms of actual buyers of magazines (regardless of publicity via movies, TV, etc.) the market is smaller today than it was a year ago! You may not realize it but there is a struggle for survival going on in the science fiction field. Sales have been down for many months, and

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